

**FLAT LEADERSHIP AND THE CHURCH:  
EMBRACING CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES**

By

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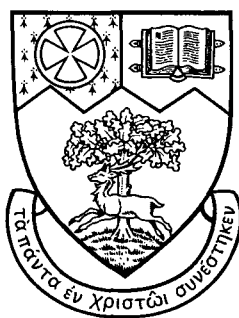
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## ABSTRACT

### Flat Leadership and the Church: Embracing Change in Leadership Structures

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Hierarchical leadership structures were once the primary paradigm for leadership in the church. In a contemporary world where culture has shifted and the rise of the scepticism of authority has eroded hierarchies, the church must embrace a new paradigm. Flat leadership is a structure that is being embraced in both the secular world and the church. In this thesis we interpret the shifts in culture and how they have altered the landscape of leadership. We also assess flat leadership as an effective approach to leadership in response to our shifting culture.

Flat leadership is a biblical approach to leading. This thesis will engage with Scripture and highlight its support for leading through a sharing of power and authority. Finally, we offer some thoughts on how to begin to move churches from hierarchies to flat structures. Flat leadership represents a Biblical approach to church organizational structures. Utilizing this approach can help churches avoid many of the common pitfalls of ministry and can promote healthier structures for congregational life to thrive.

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## Introduction

A cursory reading of contemporary leadership books reveals a growing discontent with current models of church leadership.<sup>1</sup> Despite “over 9,000 different systems, languages, principles and paradigms to help explain the mysteries of management and leadership,”<sup>2</sup> church leaders are struggling to figure out how they can lead more effectively in light of the challenges presented by a changing culture and a changing church. This can be overwhelming for the average church leader and as a result pastors are burning out as they find themselves facing a variety of expectations that seem largely unattainable. Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson note that today’s churches are not looking for pastors but rather, winners. Congregations are looking for “pastors who lead. They want pastors the way the Israelites wanted a king - to make hash of the Philistines... they want a winner; they want their needs met; they want to be part of something zesty and glamorous.”<sup>3</sup> Churches are not looking for shepherds. Rather, they want “experts to help them stay ahead of the competition.”<sup>4</sup>

This is leaving pastors in a place where they are being pushed into a role that they were not called to fill. It is a role that is driven by the church embracing a secular view of leadership: a view that puts a single leader at the top of its structure and puts the success and failure of the ministry squarely on their shoulders. In many ways it is a view that embraces contemporary business models over models of leadership found in scripture. Jacobsen highlights this trend in noting that “the church has followed the

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis the term church is used to represent the protestant Church in North America.

<sup>2</sup> Buckingham and Coffman, *Break*, 53.

<sup>3</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 4.

complexifying trend of American organizational life, and the church leader has had to become at least minimally competent in the areas of personnel management, facilities planning, budgeting and fundraising, and program administration to name a few.”<sup>5</sup>

The North American church now finds itself in a place where the pastor has been elevated to a place where they are expected to lead in every area of church life.

However, most pastors are woefully unequipped to function in such a diverse and demanding role. Equally damaging are churches that place a pastor in a position of leadership with the expectation that they will lead as a CEO but the church then deprives them of the power and authority needed to function in that role. The elevation of pastors above all others has had, and is continuing to have, a negative effect upon pastors and churches.

Often, this elevation is reflected in an organizational chart where the pastor is put at the top of the pyramid. However, despite being given a leadership title and a place at the top of the organizational chart the pastor often finds that it does not work that way in practice. Pastors are given responsibility to lead but then they are deprived of the power to lead. Sometimes pastors can buy into the illusion of power that comes with their title. In these instances the pastor will then try to use their position and power to ensure that things are done their way or not at all. This inevitably leads to power struggles within the congregation that have negative effects on the congregation and the pastor. If the church is to move forward in its mission these power struggles cannot continue and it may be that the key catalyst for changing this system is the pastors themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> Jacobsen, *Tasks*, 33.

Power struggles can, and usually do lead some pastors to lose their sense of calling. Johnson and Van Dooren sum up the burnout that some pastors experience:

Where did that sense of freedom go? It disappeared when you started believing those people who taught you to measure God's acceptance by external religious standards instead of by the Cross. You lost your sense of blessing, and now the harder you try the more tired you become.<sup>6</sup>

This is an all too common and sad commentary on the state of church leadership. The time has come to redesign our leadership structures in an effort to return to a Biblical model of leadership that functions effectively in the current North American context.

This thesis will not argue that there is only one Biblical model of leadership. It will, however, argue that, while hierarchical models of leadership can be found in Scripture, the church was actually founded on a model of shared leadership that utilizes hierarchies in a fluid manner and not the fixed hierarchies that are now prevalent in the church. As such, in order to get to a place where a different model of leadership can be introduced and accepted it will take the buy-in of pastors, lay leaders and congregations as a whole. While it will take time and effort, the end result will be healthier organizations where everyone serves on an equal footing allowing the church to function as a whole and healthy organism.

In this thesis we will explore the benefits of utilizing a model that is often referred to as "flat leadership" in our churches. This style of leadership is already being embraced by secular businesses with a high degree of success.<sup>7</sup> While it may seem a contradiction to condemn business models of leadership on the one hand and then praise them on the other, the reality is that modern businesses have been adopting a model of leadership that is very

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson and Van Vonderen, *Abuse*, 34.

<sup>7</sup> For a recent analysis of successful secular leaders and their companies operating in flat leadership structures see Safian, "Secrets". Other examples of successful secular companies utilizing flat leadership structures include Google, Hunter Douglas, Semco (Brazil), Key Polymer, and Gore Industries.



Biblical in its approach. They may not acknowledge this but, as we will explore, flat leadership is a model of leadership that can be identified in Scripture. Reflecting on flat leadership in the business world will alert us to a biblical model of leadership in the church.

### **Leadership Defined**

To begin it is important that we define leadership. On a basic level a leader is only a leader when someone follows them. Leadership is about a cycle of influence. Leaders draw followers through their influence. In turn, those followers become leaders as they influence others who then follow them. Leadership is also about empowerment. Followers empower leaders to guide them. Leaders in turn empower followers to take on leadership.

This thesis will focus on a philosophy of leadership called flat leadership. Flat leadership is about shared leadership. It is about leadership as a collective group. As will be noted later, flat leadership is about the entire church body representing Christ to the world and not just an individual pastor or small group of leaders.<sup>8</sup> Moving towards this structure will benefit the church in a variety of ways. To begin this discussion it is important that we heed the warning of Mark Birchall. He writes that,

We must clarify our language, because language can be confusing. 'Shared ministry' can mean almost anything, and often means almost nothing! It can mean a wonderful sense of everyone being involved in many different ways, all part of a happy team; or it can mean a handful of individuals helping the Minister with different parts of his work - with the others being treated as passengers, with nothing to offer; maybe even preferring to be passengers.<sup>9</sup>

In this thesis we will be using the terms flat leadership and shared leadership interchangeably to mean a leadership structure where all members of a church are empowered to lead in areas of their giftings. It is not about an individual offering leadership to everyone nor is it about a small group of people leading a church. Rather, it is about a shared leadership structure that

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<sup>8</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

<sup>9</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 35-36.

enables all to participate in the oversight of the church according to their gifts. Leading from a flat structure will allow churches to maximize the leadership potential of all the members of the church. It frees up pastors to focus on working within their gifts, knowledge, and calling while allowing others to lead in areas that the pastor is unfamiliar with, untrained in, or will simply take time that should be dedicated to his or her primary responsibilities.

Flat leadership is about the true delegation of power and authority so that the entire life of the church is not dependent on the decisions of one person or a small group of people. One business leader who employs flat leadership noted from his experience that “groups that manage themselves are often better off than groups that are managed by a single person.”<sup>10</sup> As will be explored, the church was created to be led by groups, not individuals. Through this sharing of leadership the church will be healthier.

Flat leadership can avoid the power struggles that so often trap a church. As noted earlier, many churches find themselves in a place where power is controlled. Either the congregation refuses to give power to a pastor or, the pastor will try to use their power and position to get their own way. When power and authority is shared in such a way that each person has the ability to carry out the responsibilities of their roles it has the potential to end the power struggles and leads to healthier churches.

## **Methodology**

This thesis will adapt a methodology that combines a secondary literature review with theological reflection on my ministry experience as a youth pastor in three different churches in Southern Ontario. Specifically this thesis will practice theological reflection through the three practices used in Stone and Duke's work, *How to Think Theologically*; Interpretation,

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<sup>10</sup> Fried, “Way Up,” 36.

Correlation, and Assessment.<sup>11</sup> As per their explanation of this process this thesis will not follow this method “in lockstep stages,” rather, it will “constantly shift back and forth among the operations, checking and adjusting in an effort to make the whole come together.”<sup>12</sup>

It is imperative that the church pause and reflect theologically on how we structure our leadership. As this thesis will outline, the church has adopted principles and practices from the business world that, in many cases, have been have been hung on to long after their relevance has waned. There was a time when fixed hierarchies reflected culture. However, while this worked at that time, they are no longer relevant because culture has shifted away from this model. The church now needs to make the same shift. Reflection is important because, as Stone and Duke remind us, “Christian theological reflection interprets the meanings of things from the perspective of faith in the Christian message.”<sup>13</sup> Church leaders need to begin reflecting on whether or not our hierarchical leadership structures are based on the perspectives of our faith or if they have been distorted by the influence of the world.

This is not an easy task because “every church community sees itself to be conducting its affairs in accord with Christian faith.”<sup>14</sup> Our models become so ingrained in what we do that we can begin to believe that we are, in fact, acting out of sound theology. “Our embedded theology may seem so natural and feel so comfortable that we carry it within us for years, unquestioned and perhaps even unspoken except when we join in the words of others at worship.”<sup>15</sup> This is why it is important to utilize deliberative theology. Stone and Duke define deliberative theology as “the understanding of faith that emerges from a process

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<sup>11</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 28-39.

<sup>12</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 16.

of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions.”<sup>16</sup> Reflecting is questioning “what [has] been taken for granted.”<sup>17</sup> This thesis will question the leadership structures of our churches that have been taken for granted and reflect upon them from a theological position. As we question we will be “receptive and open, but honest and probing” in our exploration.<sup>18</sup>

The first move in theological reflection is interpretation. Interpretation is an inherent part of human nature. Stone and Duke note that we are all interpreters. “We make our way through [the] world by forming and re-forming interpretations of what things mean.”<sup>19</sup> We form our views “so naturally in the course of interacting with others and the world around us that at first we take them for granted.”<sup>20</sup> This is why theological reflection is so important. “An interpretation of God and the nature of faith itself are of paramount concern to theology.”<sup>21</sup> As we form our theologies, we learn to interpret our faith through a variety of methods that are “transmitted from generation to generation.”<sup>22</sup> In this thesis we will use these methods as we form our interpretation of the biblical model of church leadership structures.

Following this the thesis will move to the work of correlation. Correlation is “the process of bringing two or more discrete entities into mutual relation with each other.”<sup>23</sup> Stone and Duke warn that “theologians cannot avoid correlating interpretations even if they swear never to do so.”<sup>24</sup> Correlating is important because we must take the “existential

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<sup>16</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 31.

questions” that human life and culture raise and correlate them “with their theological answers.”<sup>25</sup> After interpretation has been done “similarities and differences between theological and other viewpoints on any given matter come to light by acts of correlation.”<sup>26</sup> Without this, our interpretations can be accused of being “empty, with no apparent correlation to the daily living of the faith.”<sup>27</sup> The task of correlation is to enable Christians to “carry out their life of service keenly aware” of the distinctiveness of what it means to live out “God’s message to the world today.”<sup>28</sup> We will correlate our interpretation of our shifting cultures with our reflections on church leadership in order that our churches can bring our structures back into alignment with our theologies.

Finally, we will carry out the work of assessing our interpretations. It is important that “when we must decide among several conflicting understandings of faith” we need to weigh “alternative theological views.”<sup>29</sup> Stone and Duke note that “to engage in theological reflection is to seek clarity not only about the relative merits of each option but even about how we determine what counts as a merit.”<sup>30</sup>

Assessment is done by weighing alternative options by putting them through four tests “Christian appropriateness, intelligibility, moral integrity, and validity.”<sup>31</sup> These four tests are aimed at assessing “the very adequacy of a theology.”<sup>32</sup> As we seek new interpretations we must do so with an eye on the appropriateness of our findings in light of Christian faith. Our interpretations need to be intelligible to Christians or the interpretations will be meaningless. The interpretations must maintain the integrity of our moral standards.

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<sup>25</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 30.

<sup>26</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 32.

<sup>27</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 36.

Stone and Duke note the importance of this process. “An assessment of theological views in terms of their moral integrity plays a role in coming to a judgment about their overall adequacy.”<sup>33</sup> Assessment is key in determining if our interpretations are in keeping with the nature of God.

Through this three-fold process of thinking theologically we will demonstrate that hierarchical models of church leadership are having a negative impact on the life of the church. This is a critical time in the life of the North American church. It is time that we stop and reflect upon how we have been structuring our churches so that we remain relevant in the shifting landscape of society.

## **Outline**

In chapter 1 we will seek to interpret the current state of church leadership. We will seek to understand how the hierarchical model of church leadership became the norm for the church. We will then look to discern the challenges and problems that this model has created. We will demonstrate that the church has moved away from a biblical model of church leadership and embraced business structures that have left it functioning more as a production line than the disciple-making church that Christ intended. This assessment will demonstrate that our current models of church leadership are generally not working. Many churches are consumed by power struggles. Pastors are being expected to lead without authority or they use their authority to do what is best for them and not the church as a body. These models of leadership are leaving pastors in a place where they have lost their joy, their passion, and, in some cases, their sense of call.

In chapter 2 we will begin the work of correlation by introducing a new paradigm for church leadership. This chapter will explore the current cultural trend towards flat leadership.

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<sup>33</sup> Stone and Duke, *Think*, 36.

In so doing we will seek to understand flat leadership in light of the shifting nature of culture. We will assess the strengths and weaknesses of flat leadership to determine its appropriateness for the church. We will evaluate flat leadership models in comparison to more traditional models that are often employed by North American churches and seek to discern how a new paradigm of leadership could empower contemporary church leaders in their work by enabling churches to give power and authority to their pastors.

One of the hindrances to the hierarchical model is that often pastors will be given a title and position of authority but never given the power to operate within that position. This is often a by-product of fear on the part of churches who become afraid that, if their pastor has power, then he or she will have the ability to lead the church in whatever direction they want to, even if it is not the direction those who currently have power would desire for it to go. In a flat leadership model the church will be willing to give a pastor the power they need to do their job because, with an equal sharing of power, there will not be fear of a dictatorship.

Chapter 3 will continue our work of correlation by examining the Biblical foundations of church leadership. We will begin by looking at Christ's call to the first disciples and correlate it to our own understanding of the call on pastors today. The nature of this call will then be correlated with Paul's metaphor of the church being a body. By understanding this metaphor we will seek to demonstrate that the church is designed to be led through a flat leadership structure.

In chapter 4 we will seek to interpret a way forward for the church. Our interpretation of the changes in culture's views of leadership and the Biblical call and model of leadership will highlight the need for churches to move towards flat leadership structures. Our

interpretation will also show that it is possible to shift to a flat leadership structure. This chapter will focus on the role of pastors as being agents of change in helping congregations adopt, and adapt to this new model of church leadership. The role of the pastor is a crucial aspect of seeing leadership structures shift and helping the church embrace new ways of leading. As churches do adapt we will see them maximize their leadership potential, their resources, and their impact in society.

## **Conclusion**

Flat Leadership represents a Biblical approach to church organizational structures. Utilizing this approach can help churches avoid many of the common pitfalls of ministry and can promote healthier structures for congregational life to thrive. The implementation of flat leadership and the positive change that it brings is possible if pastoral leaders will function as agents of change by facilitating the transition from traditional leadership models to ones more conducive to modern day ministry. This thesis is intended as a contribution to the conversation that must happen in the church today in order to help bring about that outcome.



## Chapter One: The Challenges and Problems with Traditional Church Structures

### Introduction

Over the last two decades great emphasis has been placed on redefining the leadership role of the pastor. Numerous books have been written, conferences held, and training given to pastors in how to be effective leaders. In many cases the prevailing wisdom has led the pastoral role to evolve into that of a CEO. Pastors are now the point person in charge of everything that happens in the life of a church.

Ruth Haley Barton, in reflecting on the shifting role of the pastor, observes that:

These days, the pastoral/ministry role is much more complicated. Now, in addition to those basic responsibilities, many pastors are expected to function like CEOs of large corporations. They are expected to be strategic thinkers and planners. They are expected to be good managers. They are expected to preach sermons that are culturally relevant and contribute expertise and innovative ideas regarding production and programming.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Frost summarizes this present reality in writing that we now have “armies of church leaders who resemble corporate executives and act as if church is a global business.”<sup>2</sup> In the words of Eric Jacobsen, this “global cultural predominance of market capitalism creates pervasive pressure on churches and their ministers to succeed – ‘achieve full effectiveness’ – or else face the threat of organizational extinction.”<sup>3</sup> Trull and Carter note that “as professionals and as Americans, ministers are success oriented.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, the pastoral role was never intended to be a professional role. It could be argued that Jesus himself spoke out against professional religious people as demonstrated in his regular interactions with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

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<sup>1</sup> Barton, *Strengthening*, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Jacobsen, *Tasks*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ethics*, 114.

John Piper warns that “we pastors are being killed by the professionalizing of the pastoral ministry.”<sup>5</sup> He warns that “the more professional we long to be, the more spiritual death we will leave in our wake.”<sup>6</sup> Piper sums up his reason for this in that “the aims of our ministry are eternal and spiritual. They are not shared by any of the professions. It is precisely by the failure to see this that we are dying.”<sup>7</sup> This culture is slowly eroding the church. It is increasing the pressure on pastors and having a radical effect on their health. As Trull and Carter go on to write, “we may well fear to discover that our standards have more to do with the story of the world than the story of the church.”<sup>8</sup>

A recent New York Times article noted that “the findings have surfaced with ominous regularity over the last few years, and with little notice: Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.”<sup>9</sup> In his book *Pastors at Greater Risk* H.B. London quoted James Dobson as stating that 40% of pastors are looking to bail out.<sup>10</sup> It is a startling number that demands we reconsider how churches are being led.

Among the reasons H.B. London gave for such a high number was that “people are easily enticed by cultural nonvalues. Many people in the Church place more value on success and show than on spiritual reality and wholehearted repentance and authentic holy living.”<sup>11</sup> Petersen writes that he “couldn’t help observing that there was a great deal of confusion and

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<sup>5</sup> Piper, *Professionals*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Piper, *Professionals*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Piper, *Professionals*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Trull and Carter, *Ethics*, 114.

<sup>9</sup> Vitello, “Break”, A1.

<sup>10</sup> London and Wiseman, *Risk*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> London and Wiseman, *Risk*, 26.

dissatisfaction all around me with pastoral identity.”<sup>12</sup> Church leaders have lost focus on what it means to lead a church. The pastoral role has been reduced to that of a person who gets things done. Yet, Petersen reminds us that “the pervasive element in our two-thousand-year pastoral tradition is not someone who ‘gets things done’ but rather the person placed in the community to pay attention and call attention to ‘what is going on right now’ between men and women, with one another and with God.”<sup>13</sup> It is clear that we have a problem in our approach to church leadership. Our present structures, based on rigid hierarchical models, are destroying the church.

### Historical Context

Our modern view of “church-based leadership is well entrenched, courtesy of the Constantinian world order, resulting in a clergy-dominated church culture.”<sup>14</sup> This culture can be traced as far back as Ignatius of Antioch. He promoted a hierarchical model of church leadership whereby the bishop assumed the role of Christ in the church.

Ignatius was “reputedly a disciple of St. John.”<sup>15</sup> He was appointed the second bishop of Antioch and served in that capacity until his death. It is interesting to note that little documentation exists of his leadership in Antioch. What we do know of Ignatius survives in the form of several letters. These letters have generally been accepted as authentic.<sup>16</sup> They were written during his journey from Antioch to Rome to be executed during a widespread period of Christian persecution under Emperor Trajan.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Peterson, *Pastor*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> Peterson, *Pastor*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> McNeal, *Renaissance*, 131.

<sup>15</sup> McNeal, *Renaissance*, 478. One online biography that I read also mentioned some biographies that indicated Ignatius was one of the children that Jesus held in Luke 18. However, being outside the scope of this paper, I did not seek confirmation of this statement. Eusebius also claimed that, at the very least, Ignatius was a companion of the apostles. See Brent, *Ignatius*, ix.

<sup>16</sup> A total of 7 letters have been generally accepted as authentic. See Schoedel, *Ignatius*, xi; Brent, *Ignatius*, ix.

<sup>17</sup> Cairns, *Christianity*, 91.

In order to understand the leadership of Ignatius it is important to recognize the historical context in which he was leading. First, it has been noted that, “by Ignatius’ time churches in Asia Minor were ruled by the ‘three-fold ministry.’ This consisted of a single Bishop (Ignatius links his authority to that of the single God), a body of presbyters (patterned on the band of apostles) and several deacons.”<sup>18</sup> His understanding of the organization of the church played a big part in Ignatius’ writings on how the church should be structured and how members of the church need to respect that organization and the church leaders.

Secondly, Ignatius led the church during the rise of two predominant heretical movements. On one hand the Gnostics were gaining ground in their teaching that Jesus was only a mortal man. On the other side were those who taught that Jesus was only a spirit. Ignatius’ beliefs about church leadership were born out of this environment.

In his letter to the Trallians, Ignatius outlined his belief that the church should continue to be run according to the three-fold ministry. He wrote, “let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, as also the bishop who is a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and as the band of the apostles. Nothing can be called a church without these.”<sup>19</sup> In the same letter he writes that “when you are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are living not in human fashion but in the fashion of Jesus Christ who died for us.”<sup>20</sup> In his letter to the Smyrnaeans, Ignatius wrote “let no man perform anything pertaining to the church without the bishop.”<sup>21</sup> Ignatius goes so far as to write that “it is good to acknowledge God and the bishop: he who honors the bishop is honored by

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<sup>18</sup> Dowley, *Handbook*, 117.

<sup>19</sup> Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 140.

<sup>21</sup> Bettenson and Maunder, *Documents*, 67.

God; he who does anything without the bishop's knowledge serves the devil."<sup>22</sup> He clearly elevates one man, the bishop, above all other leaders in the church. This elevation goes to the extreme of labelling anyone who dares to act without the bishop's knowledge as being devil worshippers. It is difficult to find scriptural support for this extreme view of hierarchical leadership. While the Bible does offer support for a leadership structure it does not elevate any one person above the rest of the congregation to the degree that it would be sinful to conduct the church aside from those in leadership. Leadership in the church is based upon the foundation that all can and should be part of the body.

In light of the historical context in which Ignatius was writing we can understand why he leaned so heavily on the office of Bishop. It can be surmised that, faced with the rise of heresy, Ignatius believed obeying the bishop was a way to ensure that only the truth was being taught in the church. The bishop became the local professional who interpreted scripture for the congregation. Therefore, it was safer for the church to follow the bishop than risk having others rise up and spread heresy.

However, by elevating the bishop over all others, Ignatius reflected the development of a system whereby the church was dominated by the pastor. Allen Brent wrote that, in elevating the bishop over the congregation, he was "appealing to pagan, secular political concepts in his attempt to persuade his fellow-Christians to follow where the author of Matthew had pointed in his ideal portrait of Peter as the ultimate ecclesial authority."<sup>23</sup>

Van Gelder highlights the evolution of this clergy dominance. He notes that "leadership in Christian churches in the West has for centuries been deeply shaped by

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<sup>22</sup> Schoedel, *Ignatius*, 245.

<sup>23</sup> Brent, *Ignatius*, 34.

Christendom assumptions.”<sup>24</sup> These assumptions were that “ministry was reserved primarily for the clergy who taught, cared for, and administered settled flocks, often as a hierarchical class set apart from or above the rest of the congregation.”<sup>25</sup> The set apart nature of clergy is a continuation of the leadership model embraced by Ignatius in which the clergy were elevated into a class of their own.

McNeal describes this type of leadership “as institutional, maintenance-oriented, positional, pastoral, church-focused, and highly controlling.”<sup>26</sup> This type of leadership can exhibit itself through “the neglect of real needs in favor of the ‘needs’ of authority.”<sup>27</sup> In a hierarchy, energy is often spent serving those in leadership above you rather than working within a community as one body.

This is in direct contrast to the Biblical model of church leadership that McNeal calls kingdom-building. His definition of kingdom-building leaders is “more akin to the kind of leadership we see at work in the early days of the Christian movement, in its apostolic era. A different set of descriptors captures the character of this leadership: organic, disruptive, personal, prophetic, kingdom-focused, empowering.”<sup>28</sup> Yet, the long-held model of the pastor as the head of the church led Christians to a place where “clergy were often understood to represent Christ to the congregation, rather than the whole congregation representing Christ to the world in the power of the Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> Congregations have allowed this misconception to move the church away from the leadership structure that God originally set in place.

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<sup>24</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

<sup>25</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

<sup>26</sup> McNeal, *Renaissance*, 131.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson and Van Vonderen, *Abuse*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> McNeal, *Renaissance*, 131.

<sup>29</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

The problem is not entirely the fault of congregants and lay church leaders. It is as much the fault of pastors who have a faulty view of leadership. Barna relates the story of a pastor named Steve who “is hindered by the crippling misconception - one shared by most leaders in America – that because he is the central leader in his organization, everything depends on him.”<sup>30</sup> The problem with this model is that we have pastoral leaders functioning in areas of church ministry in which they have little to no competence. This unfortunately leads to abuse of leadership as “power is used to bolster the position or needs of a leader, over and above one who comes to them in need.”<sup>31</sup> Sadly this is all too common in today’s church. Many leaders strive to protect their jobs above taking care of their church.

Barna, in continuing the story of Steve, illustrates the common problem with pastoral leaders. “Steve saw the senior pastorate the same way his father, his seminary professors, and his supervising pastors had seen it. It was an outlet for his gifts and talents, with little thought or energy devoted to working with others to build on his strengths and compensate for his weaknesses. As long as he was doing what he did best, and doing it to the best of his ability, he saw no problems with his ministry.”<sup>32</sup> Leaders have been taught to lead from their strengths. However, leading solely from ones strengths, without regard to bringing on others to cover weaknesses, is hindering the growth of our churches.

This is not to say that we should abandon organizational structures. Van Gelder reminds us that “the reality of the institutional church needs to be distinguished from the dynamics of institutionalization.”<sup>33</sup> He offers the explanation that,

Institutionalization is the process whereby particular organizational characteristics become legitimized as official forms and normative

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<sup>30</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson and Van Dooren, *Abuse*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Van Gelder, *Essence*, 158.

practices... organization within the church was never intended to displace the inner dynamics of the nature of the church, or the functional responsibilities of the ministry of the church. The rightful role of organization within the visible church has always been to serve the purposes of the nature and ministry of the church under the continued creating, leading, and teaching of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup>

Jacobsen notes that this institutionalization came about “with the rise of organizational life in American culture.”<sup>35</sup> As organizational life arose it led to the “rise of management and management science, which has more recently morphed into the field of organizational behaviour. The church has followed the complexifying trend of American organizational life.”<sup>36</sup> He notes that this complexifying has impacted the church because “in more recent years the function of CEO became part of the leadership portfolio with the rise of megachurches.”<sup>37</sup> We are now in a place where “Christianity in England and America is well known for its creation of and reliance upon a host of ‘religious organizations.’”<sup>38</sup> While this may have been an acceptable organizational structure 20 years ago the church has allowed its organization to continue to mirror culture long after culture stopped embracing these structures. As noted above, this is having a dramatically negative effect upon clergy and congregations alike.

### **Cultural Shift**

It is time for the church to return organization to a place where it is serving the unique purpose of the church. This is especially important because our culture is shifting away from hierarchies and the church is quickly finding itself in a place of irrelevance as it clings to aging structures. “Society,” writes Frost, “at least in its overtly non-Christian manifestation,

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<sup>34</sup> Van Gelder, *Essence*, 158.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobsen, *Tasks*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Jacobsen, *Tasks*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> Jacobsen, *Tasks*, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Jacobsen, *Task*, 32.



is ‘over’ Christendom.”<sup>39</sup> Leaders today need “to recognize that we live in a time of transition, where the old Christendom is dying and the new postmodern world is emerging.”<sup>40</sup> David Kinnaman has noted that there is a “changing spiritual narrative” in North America today that contributes to our culture’s discontinuity from previous eras.<sup>41</sup> We must adapt to the changed narrative in the same way that Jesus warned us to not put new wine into old wineskins.<sup>42</sup> The problem is that, while at one point in time the old wineskins served a purpose and functioned well, as they aged they were no longer useful. In the same way, while our existing leadership structures once served a purpose and functioned well, they are now aged and no longer useful in the church.

One aspect of this changing narrative he calls the “*scepticism of authority*” which is characterized by “new questions about who to believe and why.”<sup>43</sup> This scepticism of authority means that church leaders can no longer lead as they have done over the past centuries and our church can no longer structure our leadership as we have historically. Society no longer places a high value on position. As such, church leaders need to recognize that simply filling the role of clergy no longer implies that people will respect you as a person in authority.

Postmoderns now approach the world with a posture of scepticism and suspicion that must be understood if we are to lead effectively. “The posture of suspicion that postmoderns assume toward modernity illustrates how disempowered people have felt because of the real ways they have struggled to be acknowledged and heard as something other than a cog in the

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<sup>39</sup> Frost, *Exiles*, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Webber, *Theology*, 198.

<sup>41</sup> Kinnaman, *Lost*, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:21-22 and Luke 5:33-39

<sup>43</sup> Kinnaman, *Lost*, 50. See also Deyoung & Kluck, *Emergent*, 159 in which the authors note that “much of the disdain for preaching is really an uneasiness about authority and control.”

machinery over which they have no control."<sup>44</sup> The church has functioned for too long as if the congregants were simply cogs in the system, filling volunteer roles to get things done but not possessing any authority. Postmoderns now reject this model of leadership.

In many cases this rejection has come in the form of postmoderns leaving the church. Keel goes on to wonder whether we "are destined to continue animating the imagination and practices of a response to a modern (or premodern/medieval) landscape? While there may be some people in today's world patient enough to wait and see how we will respond, many others have simply moved on."<sup>45</sup> They have moved on because they want a world without borders. "Postmodern culture is a culture with porous boundaries and loose definitions."<sup>46</sup> The reason people are walking away from the church is because of this desire to find a place without boundaries.

Much of the church is mired in modern practices and approaches to culture that sought to place boundaries around everything. Modernity "broke reality down into categorically differentiated and easily identified systems that quickly define what is what, who is who, and what belongs where."<sup>47</sup> The church embraced this and created leadership structures that put everyone in their place, ensured only those at the top kept the power, and slotted everyone else in so that the charts were full. While this approach to leadership structures worked at one time it just does not work anymore. We need to understand that "God's economy involves a community, for none of us can know well enough by ourselves the multifaceted wisdom of God."<sup>48</sup> Hierarchical leadership structures can be a hinderance to the formation of community because the structure can prohibit the participation and

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<sup>44</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 115.

<sup>45</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 113.

<sup>46</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 113.

<sup>47</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 112.

<sup>48</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 225.

involvement of the entire church body. The need to go through various channels to talk to people higher up in a structure can prevent community from happening.

Van Gelder sees a shift in church leadership as a result of scepticism and suspicion. "With the collapse of functional Christendom, the role and nature of leadership in Christian communities are being fundamentally re-evaluated. A new paradigm is emerging to replace the professional model: that of the participatory leader."<sup>49</sup> Leaders need to begin participating in the life of the church and not simply acting as a professional leader placed in charge over the congregation. A couple of the key questions being asked about the structure of leadership is whether or not a hierarchy needs to be static and if there really needs to be a strong leader at the top of dynamic, bottom-up operations.<sup>50</sup> More relevant today would be a structure that employs fluid hierarchies that can quickly shift to meet the needs of the congregation and allow for those with the best gifts and skills to make decisions when the needs arise.

### **Aging Models**

As churches begin to wrestle with these questions Tim Keel warns that "churches that continue to do what has always been done die a slow death caused by aging, atrophy, and irrelevance."<sup>51</sup> This is the greatest danger of hanging on to our hierarchical leadership models. We endanger our churches by clinging to aging models of leadership that are no longer relevant in our ever-changing society.

Minatrea picks up on Keel's imagery of atrophy. He observes that "among the most commonly observed debilitating conditions of the elderly is osteoporosis, a condition characterized by bones that become brittle and increasingly liable to fracture."<sup>52</sup> He goes on

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<sup>49</sup> Van Gelder and Zscheile, *Missional*, 155.

<sup>50</sup> Saffian, "GenFlux," 18.

<sup>51</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 90.

<sup>52</sup> Minatrea, *Shaped*, 144.

to illustrate metaphorically that osteoporosis also happens in the church. Minatrea writes that “observers of churches often note similarities between this condition in aging physical structures and aging ecclesial structures.”<sup>53</sup> As with aging bodies (physical structures) “aging church structures are often rigid, brittle, and inflexible, unable to adapt to their changing environments.”<sup>54</sup> The modern church suffers from osteoporosis in its leadership structures. These structures have become rigid, brittle, and inflexible. As a result, many churches have been unable to adapt to the changing environments around them.

However, this is not to say that all that is modern is bad. It is important to recognize that “the emerging church greatly exaggerates the differences between modernism and postmodernism.”<sup>55</sup> We need to be reminded that, despite the many differences between the modern and the post modern,

We still have the same basic human needs. We all want to be accepted. We all want to know that we are loved. We all long for purpose. We also long for spiritual fulfillment and meaning.<sup>56</sup>

As such, our criticism of existing leadership structures must not be based on a desire to remove everything modern. We cannot argue that flat leadership is a better structure simply because it is considered post-modern. Carson has noted that, due in part to a push to remove modernity, “there are plenty of blunt dismissals of some suburban conservative ministry styles, such as hierarchical staff structures.”<sup>57</sup> He is right in that we cannot bluntly dismiss existing church structures simply because we deem them to be old.

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<sup>53</sup> Minatrea, *Shaped*, 144.

<sup>54</sup> Minatrea, *Shaped*, 144.

<sup>55</sup> Deyoung and Kluck, *Emergent*, 152.

<sup>56</sup> Deyoung and Kluck, *Emergent*, 152.

<sup>57</sup> Carson, *Conversant*, 54.

He gives one reason for this in the form of his first criticism of the emerging church movement. The “movement’s understanding of Modernism seems too reductionist and wooden. The modern period is treated as if it were all of a piece, consistently devoted to the rational, cerebral, the linear, the absolute, the objective.”<sup>58</sup> This is a valid criticism and it emphasises the point that we cannot simply throw out all that is modern because it is modern. Carson goes on to warn that “we can corrupt any system; we can turn any epistemological structure to perverted ends; we can twist any ideology, we can invent evil uses out of any invention or discovery.”<sup>59</sup> This is self-evident and a great caution for those wishing to adopt flat leadership simply to avoid anything considered old. We can quickly take the new and corrupt it as well.

Instead, we must pay close attention to the failure of the present model in order to rationally justify moving to flat leadership. Change for the sake of change is never positive. It can generate a significant amount of anxiety as people scramble to keep changing to avoid becoming irrelevant. But, anxiety “is the worst enemy of wisdom.”<sup>60</sup> People who push change out of anxiety are bound to spend more time cleaning up messes when they should have spent more time on reflection before adopting the change.

As Robert Safian predicts, “in our hypernetworked, mobile, social, global world, the rules and plans of yesterday are increasingly under pressure; the enterprises and individuals that will thrive will be those willing to adapt and iterate, in a disciplined, unsentimental way.”<sup>61</sup> For the church to thrive pastors will need to be willing to help their churches adapt to

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<sup>58</sup> Carson, *Conversant*, 59.

<sup>59</sup> Carson, *Conversant*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Jenkins, *Letters*, 64.

<sup>61</sup> Safian, “Adrian Brody,” 11.

the changing culture. As Safian wrote, this will require pastors to be willing to make changes in an unsentimental way.

John Maxwell refers to this as the Law of Sacrifice. A leader must be willing to "give up if they want to go up."<sup>62</sup> Churches that will last need to be staffed with Pastors who are willing to let go of sentimentality and release some of the power and authority that contemporary hierarchical structures bring with them. This changed perspective will also need to be embraced by the whole of church leadership as well as the congregations.

This change can be especially difficult for pastors who have seen growth in a church at one time yet are now in a phase where the ministry is experiencing atrophy. Dawn and Peterson equate this to the story of Timothy who "enters in a congregational mess with the mandate to straighten it out."<sup>63</sup> In observing Timothy we can see how he was able to bring about great change in the church. Yet, there is a great danger in these situations that the church will soon move from growth to decline.

Congregational mess provides a particularly perilous condition for convincing us that we are necessary. Others have messed up, done it badly, behaved irresponsibly, and *we* are called in to make a difference. The very fact that *we* are called in must mean that we are competent in comparison to the incompetence of others, that we are capable. We are flattered, of course. We've been noticed.<sup>64</sup>

These conditions lead to problems when pastors "become chained to the agenda set before us, a slave to the conditions we've entered into."<sup>65</sup> In these situations pastors begin to rely on doing what they have always done because it worked in the past. They keep pushing what once worked far beyond its effectiveness.

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<sup>62</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 183.

<sup>63</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 121.

<sup>64</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 121.

<sup>65</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 121.

A successful attempt to save life has been held on beyond necessity. And pastors do this constantly. They enter messed up situations, fix them, and keep on with the same conditions year after year. ‘This is how I got saved and saved others.’<sup>66</sup>

Churches stuck in these situations experience atrophy and eventually die off. They lose sight of the shifting culture and become an irrelevant, unnecessary part of the world. The church of today cannot operate as it did fifty years ago simply on the merits of what has worked.

Clinging to a model of leadership that worked when we were saved decades ago does not mean that it will be relevant to today’s culture.

Further, rigid hierarchical structures also lend themselves to competition as leaders seek to protect themselves from those who would want to push them out. Brian McLaren warns that among the more “powerful forces in our lives [is] an insecure ego that needs more power and attention.”<sup>67</sup> This insecurity drives people at the top of hierarchical structures to fear those below them and fear losing their power and authority associated with being the person at the top of the organizational chart. Craig Groeschel highlights the dangers of this in that “the more possessive and competitive we are, the more divided we become.”<sup>68</sup> He goes on to say that “a kingdom-minded ministry is more generous and eager to partner with others to get more done for the glory of God.”<sup>69</sup> That is the heart of flat leadership. It is about partnering with those around you in order to accomplish more for the kingdom of God than we can do on our own.

This is the attitude that needs to drive our church leadership. We need to begin sharing the burden of leading our churches. It can no longer rest solely on one person to be the be-all and end-all in the decision making, vision casting processes of the church. It is, in

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<sup>66</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 121.

<sup>67</sup> McLaren, *Finding*, 157.

<sup>68</sup> Groeschel, *It*, 144.

<sup>69</sup> Groeschel, *It*, 144.

essence, a return to the call that Jesus puts on pastors. As we will explore in chapter three Jesus's first call to pastors was not to lead his churches. His first call is for us to follow him. It is only once we follow Christ that we will be able to lead. It is an ongoing cycle of leading and following. Pastors can only lead when they follow. In the same way, Jesus calls church leaders both professional and lay persons, paid and unpaid, to share leadership. It is more than just churches putting pastors in positions of authority and then depriving them of the power to act. It is more than pastors taking all the power and authority. It is about every person within the church sharing leadership, power, and authority.

We are at a place where the right change needs to happen. Despite what some would maintain, North America remains a largely Christian land. In writing about the United States Jenkins noted that “for better or worse, in numerical terms at least, the United States is substantially a Christian country now, and Christian predominance is likely to be still more marked in decades to come.”<sup>70</sup> This is important to recognize because the church still has the opportunity to be a relevant part of society. Yet, the church needs to change in order to maintain a place of relevance in the landscape of North American society.

That change needs to start in the way we structure our church leadership. We need to return the role of a pastor back to its created purpose. As previously noted, “the pervasive element in our two-thousand-year pastoral tradition is not someone who ‘gets things done’ but rather the person placed in the community to pay attention and call attention to ‘what is going on right now’ between men and women, with one another and with God.”<sup>71</sup> Somewhere along the line this got confused with the role of a CEO. As we have already noted, Eugene Peterson has observed that, in his experience, he “couldn’t help observing that

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<sup>70</sup> Jenkins, *Christendom*, 131.

<sup>71</sup> Peterson, *Pastor*, 5.



there was a great deal of confusion and dissatisfaction all around me with pastoral identity.”<sup>72</sup>

Pastors and churches alike are dissatisfied with the contemporary model of a pastor who gets things done. It is time for us to shift our models of leadership back into those where pastors can once again focus on connecting people to God.

## **Conclusion**

There is a place for organization in the church. In contemporary society the church has to have a structure that enables the church to function. With the demands of government law, physical structures, accounting, human resources and more pressing on the church it is important that there be organization. However, we have already noted that “the rightful role of organization within the visible church has always been to serve the purposes of the nature and ministry of the church under the continued creating, leading, and teaching of the Spirit.”<sup>73</sup>

It needs to be noted that future attempts to offer leadership to Christian communities could be significantly strengthened by careful attention to the historical context and theological models of Christian leadership. McLaren invites us to “trade in our private histories for one grand, shared history.”<sup>74</sup> While this may seem counter to the intent of this thesis the point is that we cannot simply dismiss our Christian history because it is old. We must carefully examine our history and measure it against our understanding of Biblical principles. Only then can we reject traditional structures. Often, as we will explore in this thesis, this rejection will result in embracing a tradition that is rooted in Scripture.

It is also important to remember that the current climate of skepticism can be a positive thing for the church. Kinnaman reminds us that “a culture of skepticism is a culture

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<sup>72</sup> Peterson, *Pastor*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Van Gelder, *Essence*, 158.

<sup>74</sup> McLaren, *Other Side*, 61.

of questions, and questions can lead to conversations, relationships, and truth.”<sup>75</sup> The church needs to move into a place where it accepts questions and does not simply force its beliefs and understandings upon others. “The theology of the modern church is well equipped to engage with the questions and threats of secularism, but it is not prepared for the engagement with a spiritual world.”<sup>76</sup> People do not want stock answers. They do not want a list of things to believe. In today’s society they want to experience God.

People no longer accept the authority of a pastor standing in front of them merely on title alone. People want a pastor who will help them experience God. Using people merely as cogs in the system will lead the church into a place where people just do not want to go. Yet, as the apostle Paul observed, ‘We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.’<sup>77</sup> This is what people want to experience. Removing hierarchies will help remove one of the barriers many face when it comes to an intimate experience with God.

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<sup>75</sup> Kinnaman, *Lost*, 54.

<sup>76</sup> Pagitt, *Embodied*, 139.

<sup>77</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:7.

## Chapter Two: Introducing a New Paradigm

Chapter one has made it evident that the long-held paradigm of hierarchical church leadership is losing relevance. Barna gives us an example of this in relating the story of a pastor who was the sole leader in his church. In the early days of his ministry he brought a fresh new look and feel to the church. “Yet time progressed but the church didn't. The people had ‘been there, done that’ before: watching a pastor attempt to be a one-man show.”<sup>1</sup> His attempts to lead everything happening in the church was holding back growth. “Like his predecessors - and, as some congregants wryly noted, just like the pastors of other churches they had attended in the past - Steve lacked skills in various areas of leadership.”<sup>2</sup> That is an inherent downfall of rigid hierarchical leadership. No one leader is skilled in all areas of leadership. “There is no leader alive who possesses all the gifts, skills, and abilities required to satisfy the entire parcel of leadership needs of any group of people or to do everything necessary to help a group fulfill God's vision for the group.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, hierarchies are often abused by those on top of the structure who wish to have input, and often final say, on everything that happens. The other side of this is that leaders are placed at the top of a hierarchy and then are expected to be a one man show because they are the ones in authority.

We can see the failure of the one-man-show model of leadership as far back as the story of Moses. Barna reminds us that,

God cautions us about the ‘I must do it all’ mentality. Moses was a bright, energetic, competent leader. Yet, in Numbers 18 we read about the horror that his father-in-law Jethro experienced watching Moses try to solve everyone's problems.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 40.

<sup>4</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 39.

Many pastors find themselves in that same place. They try to solve all of the church's problems because they want to feel needed and important in the life of the church. Yet, "the bible shows no trace of a 'one-man' leadership ministry."<sup>5</sup> Leaders are simply not gifted in all areas of church leadership.<sup>6</sup> Barna's solution to this problem lies in evaluating the response of Jethro to Moses. "Jethro had stumbled onto a key leadership principle: No single individual, even when called and gifted by God to serve as a leader, has all of the resources and abilities required to satisfy the leadership needs of a group."<sup>7</sup> Pastors must begin to recognize that it is not a sign of weakness to bring others into leadership and share authority. It is the only way that churches can be effectively led.

Church leaders must begin to embrace a new paradigm of leadership that is emerging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. McNeal, in writing on the contemporary church as a whole, states that one of the three ways churches must shift is "from church-based to kingdom-based in terms of leadership agenda."<sup>8</sup> To be kingdom based means to stop putting our own agendas ahead of the agenda of God.

Flat leadership is about shared leadership. This is the lesson that Moses had to learn in order to successfully lead the people of Israel. He had to learn to empower others to act in leadership without having to continually get the approval of an individual, or small group of people, in order to make decisions.

George Coats, in evaluating the story of Moses, draws the conclusion that "the leader creates a structure that supports the life of the people who learn that they can manage life when the leader is no longer present. Part of the task of the leader in the Mosaic model is to

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<sup>5</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Birchall plainly states that "common-sense says no one person has all the gifts needed" See Birchall, *Shared*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 40.

<sup>8</sup> McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, xvi.

make himself unnecessary.”<sup>9</sup> This is a key to flat leadership. It is about structures that allow church ministry to continue in the absence of an individual. Hierarchical models do not function when the top leaders are removed from the picture. In contrast, flat leadership is not dependent on an individual. Once Moses understood this lesson and shared the burden of leadership, he was able to handle the demands of leadership. More importantly, it was only through this sharing of leadership that all of the needs of the people were met. This is just as necessary in today’s church as it was in Moses’ Israel.

Despite this history it is worth stating that “leadership in a truly flattened world has no precedents.”<sup>10</sup> Sally Morgenthaler notes that “never in the history of humankind have individuals and communities had the power to influence so much, so quickly.”<sup>11</sup> Moses’ influence was severely limited by the speed of communication. His influence was limited to those in his immediate vicinity. His leadership had little impact on the world as a whole until communication allowed for the spread of his stories.

That is just not the case in today’s society. An individual can wield immense influence across the globe almost instantaneously. “The rules of engagement have changed, and they have changed in favor of those who leave the addictive world of hierarchy to function relationally, intuitively, systemically, and contextually.”<sup>12</sup> Flat leadership is being embraced by a society that is redefining authority. Morgenthaler, in opening her essay on flat leadership, begins with the poignant question;

What is leadership in an age of unprecedented connectedness? When information is as accessible as the Blackberry in your back pocket? When the world no longer needs data brokers, when the word *authority* inspires only suspicion and revolt, and when business, political, and religious icons are

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<sup>9</sup> Coats, *Moses*, 135.

<sup>10</sup> Morgenthaler, *Flattened*, 186.

<sup>11</sup> Morgenthaler, *Flattened*, 186.

<sup>12</sup> Morgenthaler, *Flattened*, 186.

deconstructed at the click of a mouse button? What does it really mean to be in charge of anything?<sup>13</sup>

This is the reality and leadership crisis that the church is facing. The church finds itself in a world where authority is no longer bestowed upon a position or title. Being in charge takes on a new meaning when authority is a fluid concept.

In past centuries a person hired to the position of clergy was bestowed with power and authority based solely on that position. However, society no longer bestows authority because of titles. Influence has become the prime motivator that results in people giving power and authority to an individual or institution. Maxwell refers to this as the law of influence. He writes that “titles don’t have much value when it comes to leading.”<sup>14</sup> He reminds us that “true leadership cannot be awarded, appointed, or assigned. It comes only from influence, and that can’t be mandated. It must be earned.”<sup>15</sup> It is no longer enough for a church leader to be given a title to be considered a leader. “The only thing a title can buy is a little time – either to increase your level of influence with others or to erase it.”<sup>16</sup> To truly lead in today’s world a person must influence others in order to gain the right to lead.

### **A New Model**

It is important to note that this thesis is not aimed at creating a specific model of flat leadership. Safian points out that “there is no single model of what it will take to succeed now.”<sup>17</sup> To build a single model would negate the model’s effectiveness in a world of continual change. Rather, flat leadership is a philosophy, a way of doing life together. How it takes shape will look radically different among the myriad of contexts of the local church.

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<sup>13</sup> Morgenthaler, *Flattened*, 174.

<sup>14</sup> Maxwell, *Rules*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Maxwell, *Rules*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Maxwell, *Rules*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Safian, *Flux*, 101.

Friedman illustrates this shift by using the metaphor of the pizza. “The most popular food in the world is not the Big Mac. It’s pizza.”<sup>18</sup> The reason for this is that “it is just a flat piece of dough on which every culture puts its own distinctive foods and flavors.”<sup>19</sup> He goes on to illustrate that pizza in Japan is not the same as pizza in Thailand. As a result “the flat-world platform is just like that pizza dough. It allows different cultures to season and flavour it as they like.”<sup>20</sup> In the same way there is no one specific model of flat leadership. Flat leadership is simply the dough and how flat leadership looks in each context will vary based on the flavour of the context in which it is employed.

One of the benefits of this is that it allows “for the preservation” of the “local culture.”<sup>21</sup> Moving to flat leadership does not mean a church will have to be recreated. Just the opposite is true. Each church can become flat while preserve the unique DNA that defines that church.

On the other side of all of this change Brian McLaren envisions a church where “surrounded by a world more accustomed to organizational reengineering, divestitures, mergers, buyouts, and selloffs, the church will develop a more open, stage-oriented ecclesiology... This ecclesiology, rather than offering a single structural blueprint, will offer some general principles for church structure, all based on one elegant assumption...Organizational structure is like a pair of shoes. You fit the shoes to the feet; you don’t make the feet fit the shoes.”<sup>22</sup> There is no one single model or structure of leadership that will fit every church. As such, this thesis will not work towards developing a single model or structure of leadership as being the best practice. Evaluating the successes and

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<sup>18</sup> Friedman, *Flat*, 478.

<sup>19</sup> Friedman, *Flat*, 478.

<sup>20</sup> Friedman, *Flat*, 479.

<sup>21</sup> Friedman, *Flat*, 479.

<sup>22</sup> McLaren, *Other Side*, 105.

failures of those employing flat leadership will serve as a catalyst for discussion and movement.

It should also be noted that, while it may seem contradictory to criticize our existing models of church leadership because they are rooted in secular business and then look to secular business for a new model, this is not the case. Culture has been informing church practices for centuries. As the pizza analogy has illustrated the church is often seasoned and flavored by culture. Culture can also alert us to Biblical principles. Flat leadership has been replacing hierarchical leadership in business with success. Flat leadership as it is being used in secular business, though not by design, is very much a biblical approach to leadership. Therefore, there is no contradiction in looking at how businesses are utilizing this paradigm. This is an example of culture alerting us to a Biblical truth. Therefore, examining culture's use of flat leadership will allow the church to learn from their experience and, in turn, move towards a Biblical approach.

There is a driving force behind this paradigm shift that should not be overlooked. Safian, after discussions with multiple CEO's and other business leaders, sums up their present day concern with the tumultuous pace of change. He writes that "their overriding concern is simple: traditional organizational structures no longer seem sufficient."<sup>23</sup> These cumbersome structures prevent organizations from adapting to the rapid pace of change. In explaining how we got to this point Safian goes on to say that,

This is the great challenge of 21st-century leadership. We have grown up with certain assumptions about what works in an enterprise, what the metrics for success are, how we organize and deploy resources. The bulk of those assumptions are wrong now. The world in which we were raised and trained no longer exists.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Safian, *Flux*, 98.

<sup>24</sup> Safian, *Flux*, 98.



Leaders need to redefine leadership in order to survive in this new reality. However, leaders should not fear this change or the seeming chaos surrounding the demise of existing structures. Safian coined the term generation flux to define this new reality of the pace of change. He uses this term because it explains “how the dizzying velocity of change in our economy has made chaos the defining feature of modern business.”<sup>25</sup> Chaos defines our world today. It is the chaos of the pace of change where companies are driven to create new products at a pace most people cannot maintain.

Yet this chaos is not inherently bad. Margaret Wheatley, a management professor who heralded the demise of the modern business leadership structure over twenty years ago, pointed out that chaos can be a force for good. She based this observation on nature where we see that “dissipative structures demonstrate that disorder can be a source of new order, and that growth appears from disequilibrium, not balance.”<sup>26</sup> This is true in nature and it is true in organizations. Wheatley points out that,

The things we fear most in organizations – disruptions, confusion, chaos – need not be interpreted as signs that we are about to be destroyed. Instead, these conditions are necessary to awaken creativity.<sup>27</sup>

The chaos of our times will be the very catalyst we need to strengthen the church. Through creative approaches to our leadership structures we will be able to redefine leadership in a way that will allow us to face the challenges of doing ministry in our present reality.

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<sup>25</sup> Safian, *Flux*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Wheatley, *Leadership*, 7.

## Fluid Hierarchies

However, flat leadership must not be confused with no leadership. Safian reminds us that, “in today's chaos, leadership is more critical than ever—but a different kind of leadership.”<sup>28</sup> That is where creativity will be most important. Leadership must be redefined because we cannot simply do away with leaders. There is still a critical need for strong leadership in a flat society.

What flat leadership offers is a structure where mini hierarchies allow for the fluid shifting of leadership as needs shift. Leadership will always be necessary. What is not necessary are rigid structures where the same person or group of people maintain the power and authority. Mini hierarchies means that people are elevated into leadership in specific areas where they have full power and authority to act in their areas without having to seek the permission of those in higher leadership positions. As will be explored at the end of chapter two, enabling these mini hierarchies to function in a fluid structure allows for the best people to make the right decisions based on skills and giftings. One example of mini hierarchies in practice is Gore Industries. Their structure will be examined in greater detail in chapter two. They employ mini hierarchies that operate within a fluid structure so that, as needs arise, people with the skills and gifts in those areas can rise up in leadership to address those needs.

In the same way, the church needs strong leadership that can shift as needs shift. First, it needs to be acknowledged that leadership does serve a purpose in the church. The church needs management to handle its day to day operations, especially the contemporary church which has a responsibility to handle the finances and buildings of the church with due diligence. There is also a need to satisfy the legal realm of church management. As we will explore in chapter three there are passages in Scripture that highlight the management side of

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<sup>28</sup> Safian, *Flux*, 101.

church life. The leadership lessons passed on to Moses by Jethro serves as one example of the need for church management. It is nearly impossible for the church to function without some established order that exists to enable the church to meet the needs of its people.

Bob Buford, in quoting management guru Peter Drucker, reminds us that “the function of management in a church is to make the church more church-like, not to make it more business-like.”<sup>29</sup> It could be argued that management in the church can be traced back to Moses and Jethro. The choosing of the seven in Acts 6 to oversee the daily operation of the church further highlights the need for management within the church to ensure that all of the functions of the church are carried out. We can also argue that these passages serve as a case study of flat leadership. Moses appointed leaders to share the burden of serving the people. The seven that were chosen in Acts 6 were given the authority to manage the affairs of the church so that the other leaders could devote themselves to their areas of strength and specific calling. Again, this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Second, Bill Hybels has argued that “the church is the most leadership-intensive enterprise in society.”<sup>30</sup> This is because churches are largely driven by volunteers. No one person can lead a church. As such, even small churches rely on a large volunteer force to enable ministry to take place. Good, strong leadership is important in this setting because people are not bound to stay in their roles or complete their duties. As a volunteer, a person can walk away whenever they choose. It falls on strong leadership and a high level of engagement to keep people coming back week after week to serve.

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<sup>29</sup> Buford, *Drucker*, 95.

<sup>30</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 18.

The result of this environment is that “positional leadership doesn’t work in volunteer organizations.”<sup>31</sup> When people assume a position and then assume they can lead however they want it quickly drives volunteers away. That reality gives greater urgency for the church to shift leadership paradigms. To illustrate this point Gray-Reeves and Perham, having surveyed a number of emergent Anglican churches, noted that “when asked where authority lies, emergent Christians will finally relent and say that it is found in the mix between Scripture and the community – not as handed down by the institution of the church, but rather as it is locally discerned by those in the body.”<sup>32</sup> The shift away from hierarchical leadership has already begun in society. It is up to the leadership of our churches to embrace this shift or, as noted in our previous chapter, risk atrophy and the eventual death of the church. As Hybels noted, positional leadership is already ineffective in volunteer organizations. We need a new paradigm.

However, when we begin to look at a new paradigm, we do not want to simply run towards the latest trends and fads. Embracing flat leadership cannot be done because it is the new thing. It cannot be done without careful consideration. Frost and Hirsch came to this same conclusion. They became “increasingly convinced that what the church needs to find its way out of the situation it’s in at the beginning of the twenty-first century is not more faddish theories about how to grow the church without fundamentally reforming its structures. What the church needs is a revolutionary new approach.”<sup>33</sup> Halter and Smay agree. They wrote that “finding the beauty and power of the missional/incarnational church isn’t just about new ways of leading the church.”<sup>34</sup> The dilemma here is that solving the problems in the church

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<sup>31</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *Shaping*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> Halter and Smay, *Gathered*, 91.

will take more than just a new way of leading. It will take a systemic change that will impact not just how people lead but the entire structure of church leadership. In light of this we cannot simply move towards a fad without carefully thinking through why we are making the shift. It would be unwise to suggest that the church must embrace flat leadership simply because it is the new fad that is now being used in business. We must put serious thought into such a seismic shift.

If we do not assess and reflect upon flat leadership we are likely to repeat past mistakes and end up with a new structure that is no more effective in leading than our historical models. Lack of careful thinking has already been blamed for how the church ended up with our current hierarchical leadership paradigms. Carl Hertz, in giving a brief overview of how the Lutheran church ended up with its modern day leadership structures, noted that,

Ecclesiastical polity, the principles of governance and organization for an empirically existing religious organization, remains one of the pieces of unfinished business left over from the sixteenth century. The actual forms of ecclesiastical administration which arose in the Lutheran territories were matters of historical happenstance, princely convenience, and theological neglect. With the passage of time, accident became elevated into principle.<sup>35</sup>

It is this happenstance that has left us in a place where we have embraced hierarchical leadership models without considering why. To avoid this, embracing flat leadership must not be done at the expense of theological reflection. We will do this theological reflection in greater depth in Chapter 3.

At its core, flat leadership is about partnering with those around you in order to accomplish more for the kingdom of God than we can do on our own. Moving forward this must be the attitude driving our church leadership. We need to begin sharing the burden of

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<sup>35</sup> Hertz, *Future*, 163.

leading our churches as it can no longer rest on one person to be the primary point person for the decision making and vision casting processes of the church.

Hybels reminds us that true leadership is “more than just working with other people, it’s doing life deeply with one another as we serve together.”<sup>36</sup> This echoes the sentiment that people no longer want to simply be cogs in a system. They want their lives to matter. Hybels believes that doing life deeply with one another “could improve the relational temperature of every church leadership circle in the world.”<sup>37</sup> That is a benefit of a flat leadership paradigm. Flat leadership is about people being more than just subjects to those in leadership. It is about people being in relationship with each other and working together for the cause of God's kingdom on earth.

As was mentioned above, Christ first calls pastors to follow Him. This is the proper relationship that we need to maintain in the church. Christ is the head of the church, not a pastor or small group of people. With Jesus at the head of our churches pastors and leaders are called to work together in shared leadership as those who are ultimately not the leaders, they are followers of the true leader of the church; Jesus.

It must be understood that shared leadership is about every person within the church sharing leadership, power, and authority. The authors of a recent survey of emergent congregations within the Anglican Church noted that shared leadership is a common practice among emerging leaders. They draw the conclusion that “it only makes sense that emergent churches, made up of leaders impacted by this historical shift, and living at the church’s power edge because of their age, would work collaboratively in ministry with a variety of

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<sup>36</sup> Hybels, *Courageous*, 74.

<sup>37</sup> Hybels, *Courageous*, 74.

people and perspectives, seeking to welcome and include all.”<sup>38</sup> This is at the core of flat leadership. Flat leadership means the inclusion of everyone in the leadership network. It is moving beyond a one-man show to include the whole of a congregation at some level. As noted earlier, no one leader can do it all. However, as each person uses their gifts and talents, all areas of ministry can be led by someone who is gifted in that area.

Barna reminds us that leadership is supposed to be “the process of motivating, mobilizing, resourcing, and directing people to passionately and strategically pursue a vision from God that a group jointly embraces.”<sup>39</sup> It is this focus on the group that is missing from hierarchical models of leadership. Often vision is created and driven by an individual. Too many leaders dream up big visions and then wonder why they cannot get their churches to buy in to it. Post-modern society no longer wants vision thrust upon them. They want to be part of a group that jointly envisions and embraces a vision.

To demonstrate this shift the survey of Anglican churches that we have been referencing “found leaders of Emergent churches to be highly collaborative.”<sup>40</sup> Their explanation of this is that, based on the cultural shift that has occurred, “it follows that the leadership repertoire of all, both male and female, is now inclusive of more than the dominant hierarchical model typically employed in the church.”<sup>41</sup> Young leaders in the church will naturally share leadership as that is their cultural background. These leaders seek to promote “an open system in every way possible in order to provide not just welcome but a community in which truly, all sorts and conditions of people may find Christ is of utmost

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<sup>38</sup> Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> Barna, *Fish*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 2.

<sup>41</sup> Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 28.

importance, not the most important thing.”<sup>42</sup> This is a strength of flat leadership. It provides a framework where everyone can be involved in the life of the church, not just a select few. It enables us to create communities that are open to all and where all people can find Christ.

As was alluded to earlier in this chapter there are businesses that are successfully adopting flat leadership. The church can learn from their collective wisdom in considering how to make this shift. Among the leaders in this area is Gore Industries. Gore was founded on a flat leadership philosophy and continues to utilize this structure. Bill Gore began his company in 1958.<sup>43</sup> His previous experience in business with DuPont made him

...familiar with the workings of traditional companies, and he knew that he wanted his new business venture to be different, especially in how people communicated with each other. Gore often said that, in hierarchical organizations, ‘communication really happens in the car pool.’ Meaning that the car pool was the only place where people felt free to talk to each other without worrying about the chain of command.<sup>44</sup>

This led him to build a leadership structure unlike any other company. He started with a “competitive strategy” that “is supported by a unique approach to leadership. Many people step forward and take on a variety of leadership roles, but these roles are not part of a hierarchical structure and traditional authority is not vested in the roles.”<sup>45</sup> As such, leadership at Gore “is a dynamic and fluid process where leaders are defined by ‘followership.’ Future leaders emerge because they gain credibility with other associates.”<sup>46</sup> It has been mentioned earlier that contemporary society has a scepticism of authority that no longer gives authority to a position. Gore’s approach to authority is an answer to this scepticism because it gives authority to a person regardless of their position. At Gore “there

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<sup>42</sup> Gray-Reeves and Perham, *Hospitality*, 30.

<sup>43</sup> Collins, *Wiki*, 185.

<sup>44</sup> Collins, *Wiki*, 185.

<sup>45</sup> Hitt, et al, *Globalization*, 179.

<sup>46</sup> Hitt, et al, *Globalization*, 179.



is no positional power; you are only a leader if teams decide to respect and follow you.”<sup>47</sup>

Authority is a fluid concept. “Associates step forward to lead when they have the expertise to do so.”<sup>48</sup> People are given the authority to lead in areas of their knowledge and experience as needs arise.

The church can learn from this practice. When final decision making power is left in the hands of a few people the wrong decisions are often made out of a lack of knowledge and skill. Flat leadership is an answer to this because it allows the right people, those with the knowledge, skills, and giftings, to make the final decisions. It has been discussed earlier that no one person can be gifted to lead in all areas of ministry. “Within Gore, this practice is referred to as *knowledge-based decision-making*.” Based on this practice decisions are “made by the most knowledgeable person, not the person in charge.”<sup>49</sup> These leaders emerge because Gore asks

...their people who they *want* to lead them. Leadership at Gore is determined by ‘followership.’ Leaders emerge because they gain credibility with other associates. This is what Gore refers to as ‘natural leadership.’<sup>50</sup>

Rod Collins notes that, at Gore, “in true self-organizing form, the followers determine the leaders, and the leaders remain in their roles as long as they continue to maintain the respect and support of their peers.”<sup>51</sup> He goes on to point out that “for the most part, leadership at Gore is not a permanently assigned position, but rather a temporary role that is continually earned for as long as a particular project may last.”<sup>52</sup> This is an example of Gore employing mini hierarchies. The ability for leadership to shift as the needs shift is a strength of flat

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<sup>47</sup> Gill, *Theory*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Hitt, et al, *Globalization*, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Hitt, et al, *Globalization*, 179.

<sup>50</sup> Higson, *Uncommon*, 175.

<sup>51</sup> Collins, *Wiki*, 185.

<sup>52</sup> Collins, *Wiki*, 185.

leadership that will serve the church well. Churches can begin to move away from a model where positions are filled on a yearly basis. This nomination process can often result in the wrong people being put into leadership positions simply to fill a hole in a nomination slate. Rather, churches can begin filling leadership positions with time limits established based on the length of the need, not on a standard one or three year term.

While some in the church may argue that leaders should remain in their roles as long as God keeps them there it would serve leaders well to pay attention to their own strengths as well as paying attention to the shifting needs of the church. Leaders would also do well to pay attention to the support they receive from their congregation. Getting comfortable in a role because a leader views it as a permanent position can lead them into a place where their congregation no longer needs, or worse, wants them around. Yet, unaware leaders can stay in their positions for years past the time when they were effective.

There is much for church leaders to learn from Gore. Churches need to begin to engage the entire congregation in leadership. It is important that they allow those with skills and expertise to make decisions in those areas. Not only would this approach help the church make better decisions, it would also radically increase the percentage of people who volunteer. Gore understands this impact. They recognize that,

Teamwork is everything. Gore is structured entirely differently from a classical organisation to encourage everyone to contribute and to be inventive and creative.<sup>53</sup>

Churches may wonder why so many people are not engaged. It could simply be that their leadership structures prevent people from being engaged. A common cause of this is how

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<sup>53</sup> Gill, *Theory*, 43.

churches appoint leaders. Many churches utilize a nomination process where a list of leadership positions is filled one a year. To follow the example of Gore, a church could eliminate the yearly nomination process and move towards a process whereby leaders are appointed as needs arise. These leadership positions could then be tied to the length of time needed to meet the need instead of a standard one or three year term. Flat leadership creates space where people can utilize their gifts without having to wait to meet a list of requirements or wait for a vacancy to open up in a nomination slate.

One challenge that arises to this model is that, if everyone is a leader, then no one is a leader. Higson and Sturgess explored this very issue. They noted that,

Leaders don't hold rank, title, or privilege at WL Gore, so you might think not many associates would see themselves as a leader... in the annual employee survey, when they are asked the question: 'Do you consider yourself as a leader?' close to 50 percent typically say they do. This would seem to be a case of shared leadership on a grand scale.<sup>54</sup>

Shared leadership is effective. It finds its strength in the heightened responsibility instilled in each person. "At Gore and associates, every worker is truly treated as a partner with a stake in the profits of the company."<sup>55</sup> In the same way, churches utilizing flat leadership will engaged their congregations as each member sees themselves as leaders with a stake in the success of the ministry and takes on leadership responsibilities.

Shared leadership also has the advantage over hierarchical leadership in that changes in leadership do not cause disruption to the organization. Collins noted that "Gore and Associates demonstrates that companies built around shared understanding and self-organization are not subject to the usual disruptions when successful leaders move on."<sup>56</sup> With hierarchies the organization cannot function without a leader at the top. As such, when

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<sup>54</sup> Higson and Sturgess, *Uncommon*, 175.

<sup>55</sup> Collins, *Wiki*, 188.

<sup>56</sup> Collins, *Wiki*, 188.

a leader moves on, the decision-making apparatus comes to a stop. Church leaders will recognize this when a pastor leaves and a void is created. The church goes into a holding pattern until a new pastor is hired.

This is also a problem when a dynamic pastor leaves. Some churches are being successfully led by dynamic speakers and leaders. However, when that leader leaves, the church can falter as the congregation loses its leader. These transitions can destroy a church. Flat leadership structures can potentially prevent this from happening because the decision-making is not dependant on one person. When a key leader leaves a flat leadership model, the other leaders can continue to function without a gap or holding pattern because they are already part of the leadership structure.

## **Conclusion**

Gore demonstrates that there are significant advantages to flat leadership. It is a culturally-relevant approach to leadership that answers the scepticism of authority that pervades North American culture. Flat leadership enables churches to maximize their resources as all members are able to serve in areas where they are gifted. It also counteracts the disruptions of leadership changes.

This chapter has illustrated that flat leadership is a positive response to the cultural changes that were outlined in chapter one. Flat leadership is already effectively employed in successful business. When embraced by the church flat leadership will also empower the church to remain a relevant part of society. Flat leadership addresses the scepticism of authority that dominates our western world by enabling all members of the church to serve in leadership.

Flat leadership is a model that will enable the church to function in a world that is already flat. It engages every individual in the church. It overcomes the weakness of the one-man show hierarchical models. As will be explored in chapter three, the example of Gore Industries is also a biblical approach to leadership that we can trace throughout Scripture.

### Chapter Three: A Biblical Foundation

It is important that any leadership philosophy that the church employs is based on a biblical foundation. This is even more important in light of the shifting culture that we currently live in. Shifts in culture have impacted both the broader culture outside of the church as well as the ecclesiastical culture within the church. Emerging leaders desire a more theological approach to ministry and leadership. They are seeking models that are rooted, not in pragmatism or successful business structures, but in theological reflection on leadership as we find it in the bible and church tradition. To reinforce this reality, Webber has noted that emergents “are saying theology and practice must be brought back together again... it must seek to answer the questions being asked in today’s culture... it must speak to the mission of the church, it must form worship and spirituality and all the ministries of the church.”<sup>1</sup> This shifting culture is impacting our church structures as emergents question church operations and look to have all of the church’s operations reflect the church’s theology.

It is important for Church leaders to recognize that there is a place where operations and theology intersect. Keith Jones, in his paper on spirituality and structure, opens with the premise that his work is “intended to engage with the intersection of the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit of God, the Ruach, with what seems to be the compulsion of the disciples of Jesus to organise structures of life for, so we claim, the better ordering of the communities of belief for worship, mission and service.”<sup>2</sup> Here Jones is arguing for the need for a model of leadership that reflects deeply on how the presence and leading of the spirit should influence our leadership structures within the church. This is the place where our theology and practice intersect. It is in this place that we will find flat leadership as the way forward for church

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<sup>1</sup> Webber, *Theology*, 198.

<sup>2</sup> Jones, *Spirituality*, 29.

leadership. However, in order for this to occur we must leave the idea of hierarchical leadership behind. Jones asserts that “we might go so far as to assert that leadership based on power defames and denies the model of leadership discovered in Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this has been our *modus operandi* in the church for a long time.

### **The World is Flat**

In evaluating the demise of hierarchical structures Thomas Friedman eloquently declared that he had come to the conclusion that “the world was flat.”<sup>4</sup> This was based primarily on observations of the speed at which humans can now traverse the globe. Transportation has accelerated the speed of which a person can physically travel half way around the world in a day. Information Technology has accelerated communication to the speed of light.

Friedman’s evaluation of the reason why the world is flat is explained in the convergence of the personal computer, the internet, and advanced software which have led to a new reality. We now live in a world that has been homogenized. It is a world where all people can have a voice. A world that no longer needs leaders to speak for people. A world where anyone can access information. Anyone can upload a video outlining their thoughts and opinions. The world has become an anti-hierarchical, homogenized social landscape. No longer is the pastor necessarily the most highly educated person in the church. It is no longer even a given that they hold knowledge on particular topics that others in their congregations do not have, or at least do not have access to in any other way except through the pastor.

Further, the last few months have demonstrated the power of the internet to force even religious leaders out of office. We have recently witnessed one significant evangelical

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<sup>3</sup> Jones, *Spirituality*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Friedman, *Flat*, 5.

leader forced out of his ministry as his actions, personality, and beliefs were tried in the public court of opinion. Open letters written by several people who were hurt by him were posted online for anyone to interpret and judge. Entire websites were created with the sole purpose of driving him from office. People turned to the internet to discuss and pass judgement on him and decide what should be done. The great danger of internet exposure is that every person can now speak up in a powerful way and have influence in the process of driving out leaders. In the case of this one pastor this led to extreme threats against himself and his family. The end result was that he was forced to resign due to the extreme negative effects of the internet attention.

### **A Biblical Foundation**

Sally Morgenthaler challenges us to consider that “if we really can’t accept the reality of the flattened, antihierarchical world described in Thomas Friedman’s *The World Is Flat*, then perhaps we should take a look at Scripture and see what God had in mind.”<sup>5</sup> The weight of scriptural evidence is that the church was designed to be led through shared leadership. She points out that Jesus’ act in coming to earth is an example of our flattened worldview.

Jesus flattened the universe to reach it. God Incarnate—the Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Infinite—leaves the realms of glory, subjecting himself to human existence and pouring himself out for the sake of all creation. This is hierarchy confounded, power and position undone. And Paul’s impassioned plea to the Philippians encapsulates this divine deconstruction of dominance so perfectly that, to this day, it is considered to be the great prayer of the church—one of the clearest and most compelling expressions of the gospel in any form. Yes, according to Jesus, the world is indeed flat. He flattened it himself.

This is the basis for a biblical foundation for flat leadership. Jesus himself worked from a flat worldview. He put his power aside so that he could reach a lost world.

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<sup>5</sup> Morgenthaler, *Flattened*, 182.



Yet, church leaders are often indirectly taught that the Bible cannot possibly speak to church structures. In failing to directly teach a Biblical approach to church structures leaders are being led to assume that the Bible has little to say on this topic. We have already noted that Peterson, in reflecting on his time in leadership,

...found that most of the counsel and direction I was given came not from Scripture but from the culture. It was, most of it, good counsel – it made sense, it was responsible. If I had followed it, I probably would not have done any harm. But I didn't follow it; I wanted not only my life but my ministry to be shaped by the Christian gospel revealed in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

To further this point Oz Guinness discussed the results of a survey of “a well-known Christian magazine that is designed for pastors and deals with the problems of leadership in the churches.”<sup>7</sup> The survey “of the magazine showed that over the course of time, the magazine had examined almost every conceivable church problem in its pages.”<sup>8</sup> Much to Guinness's surprise “less than one percent of the articles had any reference to Scripture at all, or any serious theological component.”<sup>9</sup> This is not to disparage leadership magazines, rather it is to illustrate the lack of theological reflection that often goes into the practice of church leadership. Of course it is dangerous to have people leading churches who have not considered the Biblical foundation for that leadership.

This trend towards leadership without Biblical foundations is having a negative effect on the church as a whole. Richard Mayhue, in reflecting on Guinness' survey results above, remarks that “these recent statistics regarding pastoral leadership confirm the reality that there are many bogus, counterfeit leaders filling spiritual leadership roles and they are bound

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<sup>6</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Guinness, *Growth*, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Guinness, *Growth*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Guinness, *Growth*, 51.

to ultimately fail and severely damage Christ's church in the process.”<sup>10</sup> We must not attempt to place blame for this. The entire system of leadership training in the church has been broken by years of neglecting Scripture and favouring secular business models and systems. Peterson points out that this has not necessarily been done intentionally. He writes that

None of my learned advisors ever suggested that I give up on my Christian faith so that I could be successful at this pastor business; but what they did do by implication was suggest that I give up on Scripture as having anything definitive to do with the pastoral vocation in contemporary North America. Scripture was good for preaching, but when it came to running a church, organizing a congregation, managing conflict, training church school teachers, and getting out the publicity on the new missions emphasis, the Holy Scriptures didn't offer much.<sup>11</sup>

While the neglect of scripture in leadership development may be unintentional, it is a sad commentary on Christian leadership training. We can no longer neglect the Bible in training up leaders. It is of the utmost importance that church leadership be grounded in Scripture. There is a place for leadership in the Church and that leadership must be Biblical. In light of this, we need to turn to Scripture as the basis for our management paradigm.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Church as a Body**

Scripture does establish a paradigm of shared leadership. Among the most prevalent metaphors used in Scripture used to illustrate this is that of the Church as a body. Stanley reminds us of the words of Paul in Romans 12:6 when he encourages the believers that “we have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.” In his summary of this

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<sup>10</sup> Mayhue, *Authentic*, 214-15.

<sup>11</sup> Dawn and Peterson, *Unnecessary*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that future discussions about the interpretation of Scripture, including its implications on church organization, will need to be framed in an open, shared discussion. Hertz notes that “to make the authority of the Word effective means that a more open structure of discussion will often be needed. All the members of the universal priesthood will need to engage in serious discussion together about the meaning and implications of Christian faith. For the authority of the Word is not the authority of the pastor; it binds him as much as it binds parishioners.” Hertz, “Future,” 171.

passage Stanley reminds us that “in the church, do what God gifted you to do.”<sup>13</sup> He goes on to encourage leaders to not “spend a lot of time and energy trying to do something God has not gifted you to do.”<sup>14</sup> As has already been discussed no person can be a one-man show. Shared leadership enables leaders to function at their peak capacity while allowing others to lead in their strengths.

In chapter 2 we looked at Gore and their flat leadership structure. It is a structure that allows for all members to participate in the leading of the company. As was previously quoted, at Gore “many people step forward and take on a variety of leadership roles, but these roles are not part of a hierarchical structure and traditional authority is not vested in the roles.”<sup>15</sup> It is a model that engages the entire workforce by allowing them to lead in areas of their strength. It is leadership, not based on a role, but on skills, gifts, and calling.

This is a practical example of how the body of Christ should function and can function within the context of a flat leadership model. Flat leadership enables all members of the body of Christ to step into leadership roles where they are gifted. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians that Christ gave some to be teachers and apostles, so too did Christ give some to be secretarial, some to be mechanical, some to be financial, and some to be children’s pastors.<sup>16</sup> The purpose of this is “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Flat leadership enables all people to be involved in leading out of their equipping.

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley, *Deep*, 298.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley, *Deep*, 298.

<sup>15</sup> Hitt, et al, *Globalization*, 179.

<sup>16</sup> See Ephesians 4:11.

<sup>17</sup> See Ephesians 4:12-13.

It is important to note the strength of Gore's structure that needs to be embraced by the church. Gore allows all employees to serve in leadership with full power and authority. To be effective leaders need to be empowered to act without having to seek the approval of those who lack the same level of skill in that area. A weakness of hierarchical models is that, while people are put in leadership positions, they are still required to seek approval for their decisions from those who often lack the ability and skill to make those decisions.

Paul continues to elaborate on this metaphor of the church as a body in 1 Corinthians 12 where he explains that each person is a part of the body and has a place in the ministry of the church. An underlying tone of this metaphor is the importance of each part of the body. Paul writes that no part of the body could tell another that they do not need them. He goes on to explain that, while some parts may seem less important, no part is indispensable. There is an equality in the body that recognizes all parts as equal.

Carol Troupe wrote that, in interpreting this metaphor, "we can bring it down to a local congregation with people of varied backgrounds and abilities coming together in worship and in the running of a church."<sup>18</sup> Walter Bartling goes on to say that this metaphor is as applicable today as it was when Paul first wrote it. Bartling writes that "First Corinthians 12 is not a description of the church as it once was in one place. It is a statement of our Lord's abiding will and expectation for the church of all times in every place."<sup>19</sup> Mark Birchall explains that the mutual commitment described in this metaphor "is something deeper, more personal, and much more dynamic than our words 'fellowship' or 'communion' can ever convey. This mutual commitment, God to us, us to God, each of us to each other, is in stark contrast to the individualism which is where many of us (especially those from

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<sup>18</sup> Troupe, "Body," 33.

<sup>19</sup> Bartling, "Corinthians," 69.

middle-class churches) have to start.”<sup>20</sup> Hierarchical leadership is about individualism.

Everything that is done within the organization is done to feed those at the top. Yet, Christ calls us to so much more. He calls us to a church of mutual leadership where all can participate as Christ has equipped them.

### **Shared Leadership**

Shared leadership is referenced several times within Scripture. In Chapter 2 we began a discussion of the Moses-Jethro narrative and its implications on church management. This story is the earliest example of shared leadership. It begins with an explanation of why the sole leader model does not work. “In Jethro's rhetoric, Moses' way of management is presented as a tiresome job, exhausting, foolish, and crazy activity.”<sup>21</sup> Chapter 1 outlined that this is the reality that many church leaders find themselves working in today. Contemporary models of management and leadership are leading to a pastoral work environment that is tiresome, exhausting, and in many ways, a foolish and crazy activity. Jethro's advice to Moses was both a radical criticism of “Moses' leadership” and “a positive step” towards a management structure designed to allow Moses to share leadership and thus ease his burden.<sup>22</sup> Jethro's “criticism of Moses is thereby balanced by his stress on the final success of Moses, Israel and God's plan.”<sup>23</sup> This is the same criticism we level towards today's church management. The ultimate aim of this criticism is to church leaders and the church as a whole to seed God's plan unfold.

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<sup>20</sup> Birchall, *Abuse*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Ber, *Moses*, 165.

<sup>22</sup> Ber, *Moses*, 165.

<sup>23</sup> Ber, *Moses*, 165.

Jethro's administrative reform has drastic ramifications for Moses. He is "deprived of his authority and leadership which is redistributed among the people of Israel."<sup>24</sup> However, Moses does "keep a large share of his authority" and, despite the redistribution of authority amongst a group of leaders, Moses continues to be the point leader for the people of Israel.<sup>25</sup> It can be argued that Moses' leadership was strengthened by this redistribution because we do not see him caught in the same tiresome situation throughout the rest of his life.

Contemporary leaders would do well to learn from Moses' example. Leaders cannot expect to solely bear the burden of leading the church nor should churches put that burden on their leaders. Moses learned the hard way that shared leadership was the best approach. Birchall writes that the contemporary church needs to learn this same lesson. Congregations need "to move from 'some of us help the Minister with his work' to seeing that it is not his work after all but (corporately) ours, and so to accepting that 'his job is to enable us all together to be the church'."<sup>26</sup> While this is a seismic shift it will be a necessary step forward.

In the same way that the story of Moses points to shared leadership the choosing of the seven in Acts chapter six further illustrates the need for shared leadership within the church. As with Moses the apostles soon found themselves overwhelmed with leading the day to day ministries of the church. The greatest difference here is that the apostles were already sharing leadership as a group. Yet, even with a team involved, the work was still too great.

This story illustrates how the sharing of leadership beyond the scope of even a few people ensures that all of the functions of the church are carried out and the needs of the congregation are met. The results of this passage serve as an example of, and call to, flat

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<sup>24</sup> Ber, *Moses*, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Ber, *Moses*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 37.

leadership. The seven that were chosen were given the authority to manage the affairs of the church so that the other leaders could devote themselves to their areas of strength. It can be assumed that those who were chosen were gifted in the areas of need. As a result, the apostles could continue focusing on their primary calling while the seven covered the other important needs that required attending to.

However, some may view Acts 6 with a great deal of scepticism. Some would see any interpretation of Acts 6 that points to management as being suspicious. Phillip Sell notes that,

Literature on ministry teams has proliferated in recent decades with helpful insight about teaming coming from the business world, where much manufacturing is done through work teams. While much of this insight from business environments is beneficial, it leaves many Christians suspicious that ministry teams are another way in which North American churches are following culture blindly.<sup>27</sup>

This suspicion does have a positive side. We need to be careful that we do not read our business models back into Scripture. Yet, we must also not allow our scepticism to prevent us from finding leadership principles in Scripture. Sell writes that “if Acts 6 is correctly understood however, it becomes manifest that the basic elements of ministry team formation are modeled in an exemplary fashion by the apostles in the selection and empowerment of the Seven.”<sup>28</sup> This team formation is an example of the Biblical foundation for shared leadership. As with Moses, the apostles finally arrived at a place where they acknowledged that sharing leadership is the best practice.

### **First Followers**

A key element of the Biblical foundation for shared leadership is found in understanding Christ’s call to the disciples as it applies to his call on church leaders today.

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<sup>27</sup> Sell, “Acts 6,” 58.

<sup>28</sup> Sell, “Acts 6,” 58.

Derek Sivers, in his TED talk on how to start a movement, discusses the importance of the first follower in any movement. This is the first person who chooses to follow a leader. That person makes it okay for others to follow. It is this first follower that, in reality, sparks a movement.<sup>29</sup>

The first followers of Christ's call were the spark that began a movement. In reality, had it not been for these first followers, Christ would have remained a sole person without a following. This is not to deny the power of the Holy Spirit. However, had these first followers not made the choice to say yes to Christ's call, Jesus would not have been able to accomplish his mission on earth.

Today's church leaders are, in essence, called to be first followers. It is Christ that is the head of the church.<sup>30</sup> We are called to follow him. Yet, many pastors, through their actions and hoarding of power, ask their congregation to follow them. When leadership is approached through the lens that the Pastor has final say on all church matters it can lead to congregations seeking the guidance and counsel of that individual rather than looking to Christ as a collective for leadership and direction. Mayhue highlights this twisted view of church leadership in telling the story of a time when he "asked a group of pastors to define 'spiritual leadership.' One man quickly responded with, 'knowing where you are going and getting people to follow.'"<sup>31</sup> Mayhue recalls that this pastor "seemed a little irritated when I continued to probe for a better answer."<sup>32</sup> Mayhue points out that this pastor's response "focused exclusively on 'leadership' and ignored the 'spiritual' aspect."<sup>33</sup> His summary of this story is that this "is a common mistake when seeking leadership in the church. A better

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<sup>29</sup> Sivers, "First Follower."

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 21:42, Ephesians 1:22, Ephesians 5:23.

<sup>31</sup> Mayheu, *Authentic*, 215.

<sup>32</sup> Mayheu, *Authentic*, 215.

<sup>33</sup> Mayheu, *Authentic*, 215.



definition would be, ‘knowing God's will, walking in it, and effectively soliciting others to follow.’”<sup>34</sup> This is the true nature of Christ’s call on church leaders. In the proper relationship Christ is the shepherd and pastors are called to feed Christ’s sheep.

The perspective that is often perpetuated is that pastors see themselves as the shepherds and their congregations as their sheep. This is not to say that Pastors are not called to be shepherds. Acts 20:28 outlines Paul’s charge for pastors to “be shepherds of the church of God.” The problem is that too many pastors forget that they are shepherding God’s flock, not their own sheep. Getting this out of order has led to the abuse of power by the clergy. It also leaves churches in places where they begin to worship a pastor and not Jesus. Jesus, while a figurehead, ends up being pushed out of the church.

This is reminiscent of the church in Laodecia. Frost and Hirsch write that “the image here is of Jesus standing outside of the church asking to come in. The question that should spring to our minds is, ‘what is he doing on the outside of the church when he is meant to be the Lord of that very church?’”<sup>35</sup> By placing a pastor at the top we are pushing Christ outside of the church.

Jesus must be our prime example of leadership yet the paradox of His leadership is that He came simply as a follower. In John 6:35 he declares that he came “down from heaven not to do [his] will but to do the will of him who sent [him].” Jesus was following God the Father. In evaluating the example of Christ, Halter and Smay wrote that “Jesus continues the “sent” ways of God.”<sup>36</sup> In John 6:38 Christ said he had “come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” Jesus himself acknowledges that God is a God of mission. Christ came as part of that mission to fulfill God’s plan of salvation.

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<sup>34</sup> Mayheu, *Authentic*, 215.

<sup>35</sup> Frost and Hirsch, *ReJesus*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> Halter & Smay, *Gathered*, 41.

Christ's life set in motion the community that we now call the church. Halter and Smay go on to write that, after Jesus speaks to Peter in Matthew 16:18, "the community, the missional band, has now been named 'the church,' and it is the church that will carry forth his original design and plan. The church is now his family of priests; the church is now his called-apart and set-apart people – living holy lives in the midst of the world and showing the world the glory of God."<sup>37</sup> Christ's call on the first disciples in Matthew 4 was a call to follow, not lead. This needs to be the foundation of contemporary church leadership structures. Leaders are first called to follow, not lead. Sivers makes it clear that the first follower is actually the most important leader. This is because the first follower legitimizes the leader. The first follower makes it okay for others to also follow that leader. As such, pastors lead because they first follow Christ. It is akin to the example of Noah and his leadership. One of the first things we learn about Noah is that he walked faithfully with God.<sup>38</sup> Before Noah was a leader he was a follower. Only then could he lead. In the same way, pastors need to be followers first. Our call is to build followers of Christ. This cannot be done unless we know what it means to follow Christ first.

It is essential that pastors be followers because there is a high demand on Christians when they choose to follow. Through the example of pastors and other church leaders the congregation has a practical example of how to live out what it means to be a follower. As Luz notes, Matthew "radicalizes the demand of following Jesus. This is seen not only in the emphatic 'immediately' in the description of the leaving of nets and father but also in the significance which the leaving of the physical father in favor of obedience to the heavenly

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<sup>37</sup> Halter & Smay, *Gathered*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 6:9.

father has in the Gospel of Matthew as a whole.”<sup>39</sup> Herein are the demands of answering the call. To be a disciple of Christ means to “follow, go, obey, and heed.”<sup>40</sup>

Kingsbury illustrates these demands through the example of the disciples leaving “their nets at once and follow[ing] him.”<sup>41</sup> He then shows how, when Jesus ascended “the mountain to teach, they come to him as he sits.”<sup>42</sup> “He takes the lead in going through the grain fields, and they walk with him.”<sup>43</sup> “He determines where he will eat the Passover, and they make the necessary preparations.”<sup>44</sup> Kingsbury illustrates several passages where it is clear that the disciples act on Jesus’ leading. As such, we see this as being the paradigm for discipleship that Matthew is illustrating. Discipleship is about following Jesus.

Csinos builds upon this thought and labels disciples as apprentices of Jesus. He notes that “disciples not only watched their rabbi in action, they also sat at his feet, memorized his teachings, and ‘diligently absorbed everything he imparted.’ Through the transmission of factual knowledge coupled with observing and participating in the life of their rabbi, disciples were to learn how to become full members of their master's way of life.”<sup>45</sup>

Discipleship is about denying ourselves for his sake.

Trakatellis’ conclusion is that the story of Jesus calling these first disciples “regardless of a variety of exegetical options for its particular components, establishes firmly the idea of a radical self-denial and a total offering of one's self to Christ as the true and

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<sup>39</sup> Luz, *Matthew*, 201.

<sup>40</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 83.

<sup>41</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 83.

<sup>42</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 83.

<sup>44</sup> Kingsbury, *Matthew*, 83.

<sup>45</sup> Csinos, “Apprenticeship,” 51-52.

indispensable mark of genuine discipleship.”<sup>46</sup> This self-denial is paramount to following Jesus. It is the true cost of discipleship.

Self-denial is necessary in flat leadership. It is impossible to lead in a flat leadership model without denying yourself. In a recent conversation with a pastor who participates in a church that is practicing a shared leadership model, the pastor noted that successful church leadership requires one to set aside their pride and their ego.<sup>47</sup> It is necessary to deny oneself to follow Christ. Moltmann simply summarized this by writing that “the gospel does not teach an outward and temporal but an inward and eternal mode of existence.”<sup>48</sup> While Moltmann was referring specifically to the role of discipleship in modern politics the principle applies to discipleship in general. Our discipleship is not based on any temporal existence. As such, we understand discipleship to begin with the giving up of self to follow Christ in order to attain that eternal existence.

Longenecker expands on this understanding of the denial of self when he writes that “in naming him Lord, we also take on as our own the pattern of his life.”<sup>49</sup> We do not take on our pattern. We take on Christ’s life as our own life. Longenecker sees the fault of our modern understanding of discipleship as being that “we have tried to get Jesus to think our thoughts rather than we his, and so to mold him into our image and to have him respond to us.”<sup>50</sup>

This is backwards. It goes against the very call that we are answering. Longenecker reminds us that “it is the pattern of life that is to be ours as we are committed to and reflect

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<sup>46</sup> Trakatellis, “Discipleship and Priesthood,” 283.

<sup>47</sup> From a personal conversation with Pastor Chris Brown, one of four Senior Pastors at North Coast Community Church in California, USA.

<sup>48</sup> Moltmann, “Political,” 17.

<sup>49</sup> Longenecker, *Studies*, 240.

<sup>50</sup> Longenecker, *Studies*, 241.

the concerns of Jesus, the Son of Man.”<sup>51</sup> Not our own concerns. Not our own life. In answering Jesus’ call we are committing to his life. We are committing to following him, not the other way around.

In his book on the missional church Van Gelder notes that this has not been the practice of the western church. Rather than following the leading of Christ, clergy have served as a class above the rest of the church. Van Gelder writes that,

Leadership in Christian churches in the West has for centuries been deeply shaped by Christendom assumptions. Ministry was reserved primarily for the clergy who taught, cared for, and administered settled flocks, often as a hierarchical class set apart from or above the rest of the congregation. These clergy were often understood to represent Christ to the congregation, rather than the whole congregation representing Christ to the world in the power of the Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

Moving forward churches will not be able to continue functioning with the Pastor as the sole representative of Christ. As Eric Jacobsen writes, “future attempts to offer leadership to Christian communities could be significantly strengthened by careful attention to the historical context and theological models of Christian leadership.”<sup>53</sup> Paying attention to this theological model, our churches must return to functioning with Christ as the head of the church, not the pastor at the top of an organizational chart.

We see this model of Christ as the head of the church in the teachings of Paul, especially in Ephesians 4. Paul did “not treat authority, then, as something official or sacral. He views it primarily in relational and functional terms.”<sup>54</sup> Paul did not intend leadership in Christian communities to be the work of just a few people. His view of leadership “does not result in the formation of a leadership elite, formally marked off from others in the church.

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<sup>51</sup> Longenecker, *Studies*, 241.

<sup>52</sup> Van Gelder, and Zscheile, *Missional Church*, 155.

<sup>53</sup> Jacobsen, *Three Tasks*, 45.

<sup>54</sup> Banks, “Order”, 133.

Only Christ has this distinction and he is the ultimate criterion of who should be regarded as a fundamental role model for others."<sup>55</sup> Elevating a pastor or a small group of people above the rest of the congregation is not how churches were supposed to be led in the New Testament.

While Christ is often referred to as the leader of Western Churches he must be more than just a figurehead. Often churches will place Christ at the top of their leadership structures yet, in practice, it is a pastor or a small group of people who actually fill that role. Flat leadership is about moving back to viewing the church as the body of Christ. In using this imagery Paul is saying that there is no one part of the body that is any more important than any other.<sup>56</sup> Pastors are no more important to the daily life of the church than any other person. Each person has a role to play and must be empowered to function in that role if the church is to thrive.

What this leaves us with is a church organizational structure more closely aligned with the New Testament church. The biblical structure of the church offers us a much more "flat" structure than what developed, and what we have adopted in the subsequent development of the church over its history. George Knight, in exegeting the functions and structure of church leadership in the New Testament, notes that "there is agreement that there is one group of men who have the oversight, called elders or bishops, and that this oversight includes both teaching and ruling."<sup>57</sup> He also points out that, "in 1 Thessalonians 5 and Hebrews 13, the elders or bishops are not referred to by such names, but are referred to in both cases in the plural as a group which has the unified and shared responsibility of teaching

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<sup>55</sup> Banks, "Order", 133.

<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 5:23

<sup>57</sup> Knight, *Functions*, 115.

and ruling (1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:7 and 17)."<sup>58</sup> Knight goes on to conclude that there "is an overwhelming testimony to the fact that the oversight of the church is committed into the hands of a group of men called by the New Testament elders/bishops and that their task or function includes both teaching and ruling as one unified and shared responsibility."<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that Knight would clearly favour a small group of individuals leading the church. That is not flat leadership. Flat leadership is about the division of power amongst the entire body of the church for the betterment of the church. However, Knight's exegesis does illustrate the understanding of the New Testament view of leadership being a shared responsibility and not limited to an individual. Flat leadership takes Knight's views to the next level and engages all members of the body in leadership according to their gifts.

## **Conclusion**

This is the leadership philosophy of the New Testament. The church is to be led by all people who share leadership, with shared authority, and who lead in unity. Knight summarizes the benefit of shared leadership in that "of that plurality some will be more gifted by God to teach than the others and therefore in distinction from those others will make that ministry their vocation, whereas the others possessing the same authority will remain in other vocations while they share in the oversight."<sup>60</sup> Again, he was specifically referring to his conclusion that the church should be led by a small group of elders. However, his general idea is sound in that the church is to be led by those with equal authority. As a result of this shared leadership and "the mutual submission to one another" we are able to preserve the humble servant quality of the eldership, and, at the same time, the unique

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<sup>58</sup> Knight, *Functions*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Knight, *Functions*, 115.

<sup>60</sup> Knight, *Functions*, 114.

Lordship of Christ.<sup>61</sup> This is the Biblical foundation for leadership within the church. It is a foundation that allows people to serve within their gifts yet still keeps Christ at the head of the church. A foundation where authority is shared equally. It is evident that the Bible outlines a model of flat leadership.

We find that, as the world's leadership models are flattened, the wisdom of the Bible reflects and accommodates this leadership philosophy. The key to this model is that Christ is the head of the church. Leaders must recognize this if they are to effectively lead. Authority needs to be shared in order for all to participate in the body of Christ.

The challenge now will be to enable churches to make the shift from hierarchical models to shared leadership. The primary movers of this shift will be pastors. As we will explore in the next chapter pastors play a pivotal role in helping churches change. It is possible for churches to adopt shared leadership. While this change will be difficult, it is necessary for the church to remain relevant in a shifted world.

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<sup>61</sup> Knight, *Functions*, 116.



## Chapter Four: Implementing a New Approach

Having considered the challenges for church leadership in the twenty-first century the question that needs to be answered is, "where do we go from here?" As we have seen it is fair to say that culture has shifted away from hierarchies and if the church is to remain relevant it too must shift away from hierarchical models of leadership. Not only must the church do this to remain relevant, there is evidence that flat leadership is the model that the church was built upon. In essence, moving back to flat leadership is moving back to the way that the church was designed to be organized. However, to return to this approach to leadership will take some major work. It will require church leaders to step up and recognize that they can no longer lead in the way that they have been taught to lead, or in the way that they have led throughout their careers.

To illustrate this point Keel reminds us that "the context of our world, particularly in the West, is undergoing profound transformation."<sup>1</sup> He notes that "many of us feel the reverberations of such transformation shaking the foundations beneath our feet" yet "we have a difficult time imagining what the implications might be for our churches, our ministries, and ourselves."<sup>2</sup> This thesis has examined this cultural change in order to interpret the impact this has on existing church structures. We have also interpreted Biblical passages regarding leadership in order that we can understand how the church should be structured. Yet, as we reflect on these changes and seek to interpret the meaning of them "we have a difficult time taking these broad cultural and theological observations and grounding, or better, incarnating them into our own context."<sup>3</sup> The process of correlating these two areas, our shifted culture and a biblical foundation for church leadership, is difficult when a majority of contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 188.

<sup>2</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 188.

<sup>3</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 188.

leaders were raised on systems that “developed from the landscape of modernity” which “has given a tightly defined theological grid and corresponding systems within churches, denominations, and seminaries.”<sup>4</sup> Leadership in a flattened world is radically different than this modern framework.

Church leaders will need to embrace a whole new way of leading. This change is not just related to the way that we structure our churches, a flattened world has radically shifted how a leader conducts themselves in a personal way as well. As Keel notes “the postmodern milieu in which we live is a world that seeks to bring the heart, soul, and body back into contact and balance with a dangerously enlarged and nearly detached head.”<sup>5</sup> Our existing structures and systems were largely created based on our logical views of the world. Yet, shifting culture no longer thinks in just a logical way.

As we seek to understand how we can make this shift we need to recognize that it will be critically important for leaders to understand the very nature of how to bring about successful change in today’s world. Friedman warns that “you will get fewer second chances in a flat world. In this world you better do it right the first time – you don’t get to pick up and move to the next town to reinvent yourself so easily.”<sup>6</sup> Leaders can no longer assume that they can simply enact change and others will automatically follow. Careless change can cause far greater damage than no change.

### **Moving Forward**

As we look to shift our structures we need to heed Carson’s warning quoted earlier that humans can corrupt any system, regardless of how Biblical that system may first appear. Careless change will lead to the corruption of any new leadership structure, especially when

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<sup>4</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 188.

<sup>5</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 189.

<sup>6</sup> Friedman, *Flat*, 529.

those structures dictate how power and authority are shared and utilized in the church.

Birchall agrees with Carson. “As we know too well, all power tends to corrupt, and Christians are not exempt from that corruption. Most leaders are tempted to be authoritarian, not least because there are so many who want 'a strong leader.'”<sup>7</sup> We approach flat leadership with this caution in mind. It is a model that can be abused as much as hierarchies have been. Every system of thought has gaping holes and shortcomings, thus we simply cannot run towards flat leadership and throw caution to the wind.

However, it is possible and necessary for churches to make this shift. Secular businesses have already begun moving towards flat leadership with success. Companies such as Gore Industries, Google, Hunter Douglas, Semco, Key Polymer and a growing number of other businesses have come to understand that we can no longer structure our leadership in a hierarchy. They serve as models of where we need to go.

We also have the example of churches that have been embracing shared leadership over the last two decades. Mark Birchall, in looking at churches that are embracing this leadership structure, believes that “we are still only twenty years into what may be a fifty-year period of change in the way we understand and practise 'ministry' in the fullest and widest sense of that word.”<sup>8</sup> However, he encourages us that “if we want to see results, we need to learn important lessons from the experience of the pioneers, those who over the last twenty years have developed different forms and patterns of local lay involvement in leadership.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, much has already been done to prepare the way for the church to change on a macro scale. “The abuse of power by some clergy, with the willing connivance of many laity, has been challenged, sometimes brutally. Blame has been scattered around, in

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<sup>7</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 35.

conferences and conversations, in previous articles in this series; even our church structures have been blamed!”<sup>10</sup> A lot of work has already been done to shift the culture of the church. We are now at a place where the North American protestant church is ready for a new style of leadership.

### **Flat Leadership Around the Globe**

There are examples of churches in other cultures that are being led through shared leadership. In his evaluation of church leadership structures in West Africa Oyeronke Olajubu observed that Christian churches structured themselves out of “innovations derived from the people's socio-cultural milieu to foster harmony in the church.”<sup>11</sup> As such, churches were structured with a shared leadership style that sought the input of everyone in the congregation.

He surmised that this was because their culture is embedded with a “collective cosmic view that seeks the input of all in any decision taken and in the resultant implications.”<sup>12</sup> As such, their leadership structures reflect their culture. He goes on to observe that “these leadership structures are crucial to the people's daily lives as well as to their collective existence. Hence, just as these leadership structures sustain the society, they in turn are being upheld by the society.”<sup>13</sup> As a result,

Christianity in its bid to make the Christian message meaningful to the Yoruba adopted this paradigm of the culture and has been the best for it. It is definite that these structures will continue to be relevant for they are guaranteed by the people's cosmic perception and consequently by the liveliness of the Yoruba culture. We are persuaded that these leadership structures play significant roles in the religious and social life of the Yoruba. They, therefore, constitute potent tools for the contextualization of the message of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Olajubu, “Yoruba,” 30.

<sup>12</sup> Olajubu, “Yoruba,” 30.

<sup>13</sup> Olajubu, “Yoruba,” 35.

<sup>14</sup> Olajubu, “Yoruba,” 35.

A key part of his summary is that the leadership structures of the churches will remain relevant because they reflect their societal norms. The second benefit is that their structures also allow them to contextualize the gospel. In the same way the North American church can maintain its relevance in society by allowing its leadership structures to better reflect, and reach out to, our cultural context. In order to do this there are a number of tangible approaches to leadership that will need to be employed.

### **Embrace Change as Possible**

When we begin to look at practical ways to shift our structures we have to first remember that there will not be one plan that works for everyone. As such, this chapter will not outline a specific formula or steps to move a church to flat leadership. This chapter is also not an attempt to introduce a new program into the church. Too often we get stuck in the belief that what the church needs is a new program. Instead, this chapter is aimed at contributing to the conversation while offering some insights into areas that churches can begin shifting now. Each church will have to adapt to their context. “It is vital therefore to work out carefully what is appropriate and possible here and now, and not be distracted by what happened next door.”<sup>15</sup> As we have already referenced, McLaren sums this up with the acknowledgement that “organizational structure is like a pair of shoes. You fit the shoes to the feet; you don’t make the feet fit the shoes.”<sup>16</sup> This echoes Friedman’s metaphor of leadership structures being like a pizza that is adapted to each culture. In the same way,

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<sup>15</sup> Birchall, *Shared*, 38. Birchall gives several other points to consider as we evaluate our churches and seek that first step. He uses the imagery of planting seed to remind us that there is no single seed that will grow everywhere. In every environment there are important factors to consider when planting seed. The seed must match the soil. The ground must be prepared. Most important is the work of the Holy Spirit in the growth of the seed.

<sup>16</sup> McLaren, *Church*, 105.

leadership structures are like a pair of shoes that need to fit the feet. Just because a specific leadership structure works in one church does not mean it will work in another.

To that end, it is important to address the fact that there are many people who believe that the church cannot change. Of course there is reason for this kind of attitude. The church has centuries of history that help to form our present reality and as a result some would dismiss the possibility that the church can overcome the ingrained practices that come from this kind of history. Craig Groeschel writes that “many Christian atheists live year after year under the illusion that we simply can’t change.”<sup>17</sup> He has observed many Christians who “may openly, even proudly, believe in God, but we honestly don’t believe he can change us.”<sup>18</sup> This can paralyze a church into inaction. As such, a starting point for change must be leaders who look to God first as the source of that change.

Yet, even with the belief that God can bring about change, churches get stuck. Andy Stanley offers the following insight into why change is so difficult for many churches.

The changes people resist are changes associated with the way ministry is *done*, the model the church has adopted. The model defines the church and thus, more than anything, determines the status quo. *This is how we do it here. This is who we are.* Over time, churches fall in love with their models. But models are meant to be a means to an end. Models are created to support the mission of the church. Once upon a time, every existing church model supported the mission of the church. But then a generation fell in love with the model at the expense of the mission. Truth is, for most churches, sustaining the current model *is* the mission of the church. Staff is trained with that particular model in mind. People come to expect the programs associated with a particular model. Budgets are established around the model.”<sup>19</sup>

Falling in love with the past can leave a church in a position of irrelevance in a changed world. What once worked likely will not work with the next generation. Thom Rainer

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<sup>17</sup> Groeschel, *Atheists*, 126.

<sup>18</sup> Groeschel, *Atheists*, 126.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley, *Wide*, 278-9.

described this love of the past as “the most pervasive and common thread” of dead churches that he had evaluated.<sup>20</sup> He noted that, as he analyzed a group of churches that had closed down, he recognized that “they often clung to things of the past with desperation and fear. And when any internal or external force tried to change the past, they responded with anger and resolution.”<sup>21</sup> The problem here is that

These churches were not hanging on to biblical truths. They were not clinging to clear Christian morality. They were not fighting for primary doctrines, or secondary doctrines, or even tertiary doctrines. As a matter of fact, they were not fighting for doctrines at all. They were fighting for the past. The good old days. The way it used to be.

Loving a model at the expense of the ministry of the church can kill a once thriving congregation. Stanley goes on to write that “both modern as well as ancient church history is filled with tragic examples of what happens when church people fall in love with a model or an approach to church and lose sight of why the church was instituted to begin with.”<sup>22</sup> James Berkley agrees with Stanley and writes that “every organization has its unique set of rules, policies, and regulations... these policies sometimes function more like a roadblock than a river bank.”<sup>23</sup> As such, churches need a change agent who understands the local rules to make change happen.

### **Pastors as Change Agents**

Churches absolutely must let go of their past models and move in the direction of a more shared, flat approach to leadership if they are to remain relevant in our flat society. Sadly, society has embraced this biblical principle quicker than the church. But, it is not impossible for churches to switch if pastors recognize that they are the change agents that

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<sup>20</sup> Rainer, *Autopsy*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Rainer, *Autopsy*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley, *Wide*, 283.

<sup>23</sup> Berkley, *Handbook*, 323.

will enable the switch to take place. John Maxwell plainly writes that if you “change the leader, change the organization. Everything rises and falls on leadership!”<sup>24</sup> This reinforces the reality that flat leadership is not about removing leaders, it is about maximizing the leadership of a church through shared responsibility and authority. However, Maxwell notes that he has “found that it’s not easy to change leaders. In fact, I’ve discovered that *leaders resist change as much as followers do*. The result? Unchanged leaders equals unchanged organizations. People do what people see.”<sup>25</sup> The possibility of change will rest entirely on the shoulders of those in leadership. The temptation for many leaders will be to feel that they are failures and, as a result of that, will not want to pursue change. However, we need to put that fear aside and recognize that pursuing this change is not a sign of failure. Rather, it is a sign of strength that we recognize the weaknesses in our churches and are willing to do something about it.

Beginning the process of moving to flat leadership will take the efforts of strong leaders as organizations break from their traditions. It will take leaders who “have learned the art of keeping one eye on organizational goals and the other on the organizational rule book. They know when to push and when to lay low, when to take a chance and when to play by the book.”<sup>26</sup> “Any leader who ignores the accepted rules of the game (as defined by a constitution, tradition, denominational polity, or corporate culture) does so at great peril.”<sup>27</sup> This peril comes from “members of the group [who] will expect (and even demand) that those in leadership play by the rules.”<sup>28</sup> Pastors will do well to recognize that they cannot enter into change with an all-or-nothing mentality. Henry Cloud warns us that “all-or-nothing

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<sup>24</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 49.

<sup>26</sup> Berkley, *Handbook*, 323.

<sup>27</sup> Berkley, *Handbook*, 323.

<sup>28</sup> Berkley, *Handbook*, 323.



thinking keeps people stuck in destructive ruts.”<sup>29</sup> One danger of all-or-nothing thinking is that the task can seem so overwhelming that no one is willing to try. All or nothing thinking also tends to be reactionary rather than proactive. As McLaren points out, “most changes in organization structure are piecemeal reactions to problems.”<sup>30</sup> Another danger is that you can upset so many people by ignoring the rules of the organization that the leaders are thrown out.

Caution is necessary. Change does not have to be done in a radical way. As Henry Cloud points out, shifting church leadership structures is about moving the grains of sand.<sup>31</sup> In watching ants work Cloud noticed that they did not accomplish great things over night. Rather, they moved one grain of sand at a time. Eventually those ants created beautiful structures. Changing our church structures will be done in much the same way. It will be about pastors making small changes that, over time, will return our churches to a shared structure.

Making this change does not mean that churches that are stuck in hierarchical models of leadership need to remove their pastors and boards. It does mean that pastors and board members need to be willing to adopt change or they will need to get out of the way.

When pastors find lay resistance to their leadership, it may indicate that the lay leaders view ministers as mere hired hands, whose only function is to take care of the spiritual chores. No church member who deeply cares about her church is going to hand it over to such an “outsider.” Yet, for the sake of an effective ministry, pastors need to be initiating leaders.<sup>32</sup>

Church leaders need to be the driving force in shifting the thinking of our churches. As Stanley goes on to note, “the primary reason churches cling to outdated models and programs

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<sup>29</sup> Cloud, *9 Things*, 129.

<sup>30</sup> McLaren, *Church*, 110.

<sup>31</sup> Cloud, *9 Things*, 122.

<sup>32</sup> Berkley, *Handbook*, 328.

is that they lack leadership. For an organization to remain vision-centric, it must be led by a vision-centric leader or leaders.”<sup>33</sup> Larry Osborne agrees with this and boldly proclaims “tell me the quality of your leaders, and I’ll tell you the quality of your ministry, program, or small group.”<sup>34</sup> For churches to make change they need strong leadership that is willing to drive the change.

The downfall to this is that, as it has also been noted, leaders tend to resist change as much as followers. It is not until leaders are willing to make change that they can be an agent of change. There can be a myriad of reasons why a leader would fight change. Morgenthaler points to pastors themselves as one reason. For some pastors ego gets in the way of change. She writes that only the brightest leaders “will finally dump the myth of the great man, park their egos, and follow the one Great Man into the relinquishment of power.”<sup>35</sup> Keel also references the need for church leaders to give up power. He writes that “we are all living in the pain and confusion of a liminal time in history, where the forces of change have been in motion and moving inexorably along, away from where we have been and toward what we don’t know.”<sup>36</sup> In order for us to make it through this time “we have to be willing to relinquish something we have grown quite fond of, if not addicted to. Is it surprising to you that the thing is power?”<sup>37</sup> His reason for this is that “often it is our power, our previous successes, and the very ways in which we have heard and observed God’s activity in the past that become stumbling blocks for engaging God in the present.”<sup>38</sup> The problem is based in pride. Pride that keeps leaders focused on keeping their power rather than moving forward.

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<sup>33</sup> Stanley, *Wide*, 294.

<sup>34</sup> Osborne, *Sticky*, 123.

<sup>35</sup> Morgenthaler, *Flat*, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 97.

<sup>37</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Keel, *Intuitive*, 98.

Pride that looks back on past successes and chooses to continue to do thing the way that once worked. In chapter 1 we looked at the story of Timothy and the dangers that can arise from past success. The danger that we can get stuck in doing what worked and not looking to the future. In some cases it is the pride that our success can bring that can keep us stuck in the past and not, as Keel noted, engaging God in the present.

Brian McLaren agrees with this and lists pride as the “the most dangerous darkness of all.”<sup>39</sup> In his opinion pride is one of the three “most powerful forces in our lives.”<sup>40</sup> Pride is often driven by “an insecure ego that needs more power and attention” to find that security.<sup>41</sup> As a result of this pride many leaders will resist any change that they feel is a threat to their security. Moving to flat leadership will be perceived as a great threat to many leaders because they will no longer be the sole possessor of power and authority. This can scare leaders into not only resisting, but also fighting change. Yet, insecure, prideful, leaders will only end up destroying the very churches they believe they are fighting to keep.

If leaders can put their pride aside and put their trust back in God, then change is possible. “Leaders must come to accept that all areas of leadership need to be shared, including the most public aspects – preaching, teaching, and leading worship. Such a change will not come easily to leaders who fear losing control.”<sup>42</sup> Maxwell observes that “once the leader has personally changed and discerned the difference between novel change and needed change, then that leader must become a change agent.”<sup>43</sup> Jim Collins, in reviewing the traits of some of the most successful businesses, notes that they are all led by leaders “who channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great

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<sup>39</sup> McLaren, *Finding*, 157.

<sup>40</sup> McLaren, *Finding*, 157.

<sup>41</sup> McLaren, *Finding*, 157.

<sup>42</sup> Easum and Travis, *Beyond*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 52.

company.”<sup>44</sup> Bill Easum and Dave Travis agree with this. They write that “for effective and fruitful teams to develop, primary public leaders must set aside their desire to control how everything happens. They must learn that there’s a power in teams that no single individual can ever harness.”<sup>45</sup> However, as Maxwell notes, “only secure leaders are able to give power to others.”<sup>46</sup> As such, insecure leaders will become the largest obstacle to a church desiring to shift leadership structures. However, once leaders recognize that moving to flat leadership is not about adopting the latest fad or craze or forcing the pastors out, rather, it is a needed change necessary for the future growth of the church, then they will embrace change. Only then will our churches be able to begin the process of breaking down hierarchical models and cultivating a flat leadership culture.

### **Defining Reality**

In order to do this church leaders need to recognize that the first step in bringing about change is through clearly defining reality for their congregations. Max De Pree considered this the “first responsibility of a leader.”<sup>47</sup> Marguerite Shuster explained that defining reality should be “nothing more than the quite modest observation, commonplace in postmodern culture, that a set of circumstances must be interpreted, and will inevitably be interpreted, before we can respond to it appropriately or ever at all.”<sup>48</sup> As leaders evaluate the changes going on both in culture and in the church, they “must take a position” on these changes in order for their church to respond accordingly.<sup>49</sup> Leaders “must make choices in situations where the facts can responsibly be viewed in very different ways.”<sup>50</sup> This is what

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<sup>44</sup> Collins, *Great*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> Easum and Davis, *Beyond*, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 124.

<sup>47</sup> De Pree, *Art*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Shuster, “Leadership,” 17.

<sup>49</sup> Shuster, “Leadership,” 18.

<sup>50</sup> Shuster, “Leadership,” 18.

De Pree meant by defining reality. Leaders must define for their congregations the changes taking place all around them and how the church should respond to them. Only then will they help the congregants understand why change is necessary. Too many leaders start by making the change and then trying to explain after the fact why it was necessary.

Defining reality is something that many leaders choose to avoid. Too often pastors are driven by a need to make things look good rather than acknowledging and defining the reality of the church's present condition. Yet, as Earl Palmer points out, "when a pastor has earned the respect of the people as a thoughtful teacher, then that pastor is able to teach the people through the territory of the disturbing crosswinds of confusion and falsehood."<sup>51</sup> Pastors who fail to define reality, to show the truth of where they and the church are at, leave their congregants less willing to listen to them.

When people do not understand why change is necessary they are more resistant to it. As Stanley noted above, when people do not understand the church's mission they will not understand the need to change. They need a clearly defined reality of how their beloved model is no longer helping the church pursue its mission before they will ever consider shifting that model. "The catalyst for introducing and facilitating change in the local church is a God-honouring, mouthwatering, unambiguously clear vision."<sup>52</sup> Without a clear understanding of reality we tend to enter a

...sinister cycle of activity that drives our churches and rarely produces anything that is good and lasting. This cycle of meaningless activity is something that happens naturally when leaders lose sight of the main thing. Instead of being driven by the missional purpose of the church, something else has us all running and getting sweaty, but not getting much further down the road.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Palmer, "Pulpit", 73.

<sup>52</sup> Stanley, *Deep*, 270.

<sup>53</sup> Halter and Smay, *Gathered*, 73.

This cycle will quickly derail any work to bring about change. Leaders will get sidetracked because they are too busy to pursue change. A clearly defined reality allows a leader to create a sense of purpose in the midst of change.

Purpose is essential for helping people understand why the change is happening and where the change is leading. Rick Warren writes that “nothing precedes purpose.”<sup>54</sup> He goes on to state that “strong churches are built on purpose.”<sup>55</sup> Purpose allows us to plan. Those plans become the roadmap to how we bring about change. Sun Tzu, the ancient military strategist, wrote that “the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought.”<sup>56</sup> Tzu recognizes that the general who wins is the one who made the most careful calculations before they ever went to battle. Having a carefully considered purpose and plan for change is essential to the success and longevity of the change. It is not enough to just “do something” in the hopes that it will bring about change. A sermon showing charts and graphs will not inspire people. As the Heath’s note, “trying to fight inertia and indifference with analytical arguments is like tossing a fire extinguisher to someone who’s drowning.”<sup>57</sup> Leaders will need to help their churches understand and experience the cultural shift that we have outlined in chapter one. If leaders cannot help their churches understand the reality that culture has shifted away from the very structures that the church has embraced then people will not allow themselves to be part of the change.

### **Shared Vision**

Another, but often overlooked step in bringing about change is including the entire church body in the vision. Higson and Sturgess suggest that “if leaders are to build shared

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<sup>54</sup> Warren, *Purpose*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Warren, *Purpose*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> Giles, *Art*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 107.

leadership, the best place to start is by developing a shared vision.”<sup>58</sup> They offer that “if you want to encourage shared leadership, you’ll need people to *want* to be part of what’s happening.”<sup>59</sup> Maxwell warns that “when people lack ownership of an idea, they usually resist it, even when it is in their best interest! They simply don’t like the idea of being manipulated or feeling like pawns of the system.”<sup>60</sup> It is not enough for a leader to stand before their congregation and unfold a grand vision for the church if the body feels that they are having that vision thrust upon them. Maxwell points out that this echoes his own attitude towards change. “Most of the time the key to my attitude about change is whether I am initiating it (in which case I am all for it) or someone else is imposing the change on me (which tends to make me more resistant).”<sup>61</sup> As such, “wise leaders allow followers to give input and be a part of the process of change.”<sup>62</sup> Allowing others to share in the vision will help the vision become reality. It also enables churches to overcome some of the primary reasons why change does not take place.

One of the reasons that change fails to happen is identified as fear of the unknown. “People will not change until they perceive that the advantages of changing outweigh the disadvantages of continuing with the way things are.”<sup>63</sup> People “always weigh the advantage/disadvantage” when it comes to change.<sup>64</sup> Until they see the advantage of shifting leadership structures the average congregant will not be willing to change due to the fear of the unknown. By allowing them to share in the vision they will better understand the advantages and, thus, overcome the fear of the unknown.

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<sup>58</sup> Higson and Sturges, *Uncommon*, 176.

<sup>59</sup> Higson and Sturges, *Uncommon*, 177.

<sup>60</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 56.

<sup>62</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 56.

<sup>63</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 58.

<sup>64</sup> Maxwell, *Developing*, 58.

The key to shared vision is that “shared leadership requires leaders to have the ability to show that vision, to share it, and to inspire others to understand and work towards it.”<sup>65</sup> This is no small task. Yet it is not impossible. As the Heath’s noted, “successful changes share a common pattern.”<sup>66</sup> One of the elements of that pattern is the need for leaders to change people’s behaviour. This is not an easy thing to do.

Moving towards flat leadership will require leaders to essentially reprogram their congregations into a new pattern of thinking. But, it is not simply about changing how people behave. In order for a leader to change someone’s behaviour, they need to not only change a person’s environment but their “hearts and minds as well.”<sup>67</sup> The reason for this is simple. People will work towards change while they are being led. However, once things return to normal, they will revert back to their normal behaviour. That means that, if a leader does not impact the hearts and minds of their congregation, change will cease when that leader is out of the picture. To impact the heart and mind a leader needs to help people feel the impact of the change. As mentioned above, it is not enough to show charts and graphs. People need to embrace the change as not just the vision of the leadership but their vision as well. Only then will change stick.

Lasting change can only be brought about by sharing a vision. Once the church members are a part of the vision they will embrace it in their hearts and minds. They will see the change as being more than a vision enforced upon them. When each person has the opportunity to help shape the vision change then they embrace that vision.

Ruth Haley Barton offers some practical steps in helping churches learn to discern the will of God together. Her book is designed to “provide hope that there is a way of doing life

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<sup>65</sup> Higson and Sturgess, *Uncommon*, 178.

<sup>66</sup> Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 5.



in leadership that is not so complicated and heavy – a way of making decisions that does not have to rely on our own brilliance and ability to think hard, a way of being involved in God’s work that ends up being more about God’s work than our own.”<sup>68</sup> She begins by unpacking the story of Acts 15 where Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James and the entire church congregation met to discern as a group the leading of God. When the church encountered a question for which they could not agree they met together as an entire group to discuss and discern God’s leading.

Barton points out a few key parts of this story that the church today can use as a starting point for discerning God’s will and sharing vision. The first is that they came together as an entire group. Acts 15:12 makes it clear that the entire congregation was a part of this discussion. While they may not have all participated they were at least present. In many churches significant questions and discussions are often held behind closed doors where only a limited number of people participate.

The story of Acts 15,

“illustrates the fact that leadership discernment involves *a major commitment to listening* with love and attention (1) to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world, (2) to the promptings of the Holy Spirit deep within ourselves and the group, (3) to Scripture, religious tradition (although sometimes it is the tradition that is being challenged, as it was in this case), pertinent facts and information, and the voices of those who will be affected by our decisions, *and* (4) to that place in use where God’s Spirit witnesses with our spirit about those things that are true.”

This gives us a great starting point for sharing vision in our churches. We need to move to a place where more discussions and decisions are made in the context of the

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<sup>68</sup> Barton, *Pursuing*, 16.

larger church instead of in small rooms where only a few have a voice.<sup>69</sup>

### **Develop Emerging Leaders**

The importance of pastors as agents of change has been discussed. We have also referenced Gray-Reeves and Perham in chapter one who highlighted that many emerging churches are being led by emerging leaders. Therefore, it reasons that a key part of shifting the church to shared leadership is found in pastors developing emerging leaders. Bill Hybels writes that “when I watch an older leader investing time and energy to coach and empower a younger leader, I am convinced that I am seeing leadership at its very best.”<sup>70</sup> It is vital that leaders invest in the next generation. While not all young leaders will lean towards emergent culture, it is important for existing leaders to identify those that are emergent. These leaders will, by nature, operate from a flat leadership worldview. Thus, as churches embrace emergent leaders, the shift to flat leadership will potentially be more natural.

Hybels goes on to say that “when a leader... draws out the leadership potential of scores of other leaders as well, the kingdom impact from one life is multiplied exponentially.”<sup>71</sup> Revisiting Derek Sivers’ TED Talk, he speaks of how the first follower has enormous influence over those coming after. This influence is a foundational aspect of leadership development. Pastors, as first followers, will have immense influence over the next generation of followers. Developing leaders is a key component of Gore’s flat leadership. Hitt notes that “when someone is hired at Gore, an experienced associate makes a commitment to be the applicant’s sponsor.”<sup>72</sup> The sponsor then acts as a mentor to the new

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<sup>69</sup> Barton offers a thorough analysis and practical steps for churches looking you to learn and practice discerning God’s will as a group.

<sup>70</sup> Hybels, *Courageous*, 122.

<sup>71</sup> Hybels, *Courageous*, 122.

<sup>72</sup> Hitt, et al, *Globalization*, 181.

hire throughout the rest of their employment. It is a cycle of developing emerging leaders that gives Gore strength.

Too often pastors want to keep whatever power they possess. This is largely a self defense mechanism that sees the distribution of power as a weakness that can lead to someone else taking their power away. However, as Hybels notes, the distribution of power actually increases our ability to impact many more lives. He cites several other reasons why this is important, including a pay it forward mentality. Simply put, one of the reasons why we invest in others is because someone invested in us.

Investing in others also leads to stronger organizations. “The most stable companies have strong leaders at every level of the organization. The only way to develop such widespread leadership is to make developing leaders a part of your culture.”<sup>73</sup> Developing leaders ensures that our mini hierarchies are well led and that our churches are strong.

Developing leaders also helps to avoid many of the issues related to leadership changes. We noted above that organization will tend to revert back to what they have always known in the absence of a strong leader. At some point in time all organizations go through a leadership change.

One of the great leadership changes in Scripture was the hand off of the people of Israel from Moses to Joshua. In Joshua 1:2 God informs Joshua that Moses is dead and that it is his time to take the leadership of Israel. One key part of this change is found in Exodus 24:13 where we read that “Moses set out with Joshua his aide.” Joshua took over where Moses left off because Moses had been pouring into Joshua the entire time they were crossing the dessert. Joshua had the opportunity to walk with Moses, to see how he led, to watch him commune with God. As a result, when it came time for the shift in leadership,

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<sup>73</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 219.

Joshua was ready. Not only was Joshua ready, but the people of Israel were likely ready for Joshua because he had been there with Moses. There would have been a comfort with Joshua and a sense that he knew where they were going. Developing leaders from within will help overcome this because leadership changes will not impact the vision or direction of the organization.

Maxwell also identifies another strength of flat leadership. “Leadership ability is always the lid on personal and organizational effectiveness.”<sup>74</sup> An organization’s growth and capacity is limited to the leadership capacity of the leaders. As such, a church led by an individual will have limited growth capacity. Once that leader is functioning at their capacity the church will not be able to grow beyond that level. Flat leadership means that the growth and effectiveness capacity of the church will be increased because of the collectively higher capacity of the leadership. Multiple leaders helps to ensure that organizational health is not limited to one leader’s strengths and abilities. As we discussed in Chapter 3, shared leadership means that one leader’s strengths will cover for another leader’s weaknesses.

Yet, it is important for pastors to carefully choose the right people to invest in. Stanley notes that “teaching leaders leadership will result in better leaders. Teaching leadership to pastors, preachers, and teachers results in pastors, preachers, and teachers who’ve taken a leadership course. A leadership course may make them better, but it won’t make them leaders. Pastors, preachers, and teachers who are not gifted in the area of leadership default to management.”<sup>75</sup> The danger of choosing the wrong people to invest in is that “they end up married to the model they were hired into” and not bringing about any real

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<sup>74</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 8.

<sup>75</sup> Stanley, *Deep*, 295.

change.<sup>76</sup> Too often leaders invest in the wrong people. “Leaders who develop followers grow their organization only one person at a time.”<sup>77</sup> This is the result of investing in the wrong people. While they may be good people and excellent volunteers, as Stanley also noted above, they are not leaders. However, “leaders who develop leaders multiply their growth, because for every leader they develop, they also receive all of that leader’s followers.”<sup>78</sup> In short, developing emerging leaders is a key to explosive growth because those leaders will spark growth as well.

One place for pastors to start is to first identify one emerging leader who can walk alongside the pastor. This person will naturally learn how to lead as well as how to develop other leaders. Often churches do not put young people in places of leadership. Yet, without this opportunity, they will not have the opportunity to learn how to lead. This could be done through appointing young leaders to the church leadership board. Many church leadership boards are filled with older people. There can be a great void of young leaders. Putting younger people in those positions can be a great starting point.

## **Conclusion**

It is possible for churches to change their leadership structures. To do so will require pastors to function as the agents of this change. Churches need leaders that are willing to define the present reality of our shifted culture. It will take the collective vision of the entire congregation to then shift leadership structures. Only through that shared vision will change stick.

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<sup>76</sup> Stanley, *Deep*, 295.

<sup>77</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> Maxwell, *Laws*, 208.

## Conclusion

In this thesis we have interpreted the current state of church leadership in the North American protestant church in light of shifting culture and have concluded that church leadership is facing a crisis. Pastors are burning out. Churches are experiencing atrophy and are becoming less and less an important part of society. As Butler Bass eloquently summarized, “even religious leaders know that the old church institutions are unsustainable and are failing.”<sup>79</sup> The church now finds itself in a time when “the culture in which it is embedded changes.”<sup>80</sup> Carson demonstrates how the church needs to adapt by looking at the differences between the Apostle Paul’s messages to the leaders in Antioch and the Mars Hill philosophers. “Just as the apostle understood that his moves from culture to culture brought implications for how he went about his preaching” so too must the church understand that our culture is shifting.<sup>81</sup> As a result the church must adapt how it functions to best speak into this new culture.

We have also examined and interpreted the benefits of flat leadership as a viable leadership structure for our churches moving forward. Flat leadership is being successfully utilized by businesses and churches alike. Our assessment of flat leadership demonstrated the benefits that this leadership paradigm offers to the church.

We also interpreted flat leadership as a biblical concept that can enable churches to adapt and respond to our shifting culture. It will enable a greater number of people to be engaged in the life of the church. It will also help avoid many of the pitfalls of hierarchical leadership that keep churches from experiencing growth.

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<sup>79</sup> Butler Bass, *Christianity*, 71.

<sup>80</sup> Carson, *Emerging*, 47.

<sup>81</sup> Carson, *Emerging*, 47.

Finally, while not creating a specific model or outlining precise steps to move forward, we have sought to correlate our interpretation of the shifts in our culture with our interpretation of the benefits of flat leadership. This has led us to outline a path that will enable churches to shift to flat leadership structures. Change is possible if pastors are willing to serve as the agents of that change.

Understanding the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ gives us the framework for flat leadership. As Sweet wrote “the church exists to incarnate connectedness.”<sup>82</sup> We are all connected through the body of Christ. Hierarchical leadership structures prevent us from living in connection. Flat leadership enables all members of the church to serve connected to each other.

Flat Leadership represents a Biblical-approach to church organizational structures. Embracing flat leadership can help churches avoid many of the common pitfalls of ministry and can promote healthier structures for congregational life to thrive in. The implementation of flat leadership, and the positive change that it brings, is possible if pastoral leaders will function as agents of change by facilitating the transition from traditional leadership models to ones more conducive to modern day ministry. Persisting in traditional models will not serve the church of the future and it is up to those who have often benefitted from those traditional structures to be the kind of leaders that the church needs today by being the ones who dismantle them.

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<sup>82</sup> Sweet, *Pilgrims*, 116.

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